THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO

EDITED BY CLAYTON HAMILTON

THE GAY LORD QUEX

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THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF ARTHUR WING PINERO

THE GAY LORD QUEX
IRIS

THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF
ARTHUR WING PINERO

Authorized Library Edition. Four Volumes.

EDITED BY
CLAYTON HAMILTON

Volume I. The Second Mrs. Tanqueray:
The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith.

Volume II. The Gay Lord Quex:
Iris.

In Preparation:—

Volume III. Letty:
His House in Order.

Volume IV. Mid-Channel:
The Thunderbolt.

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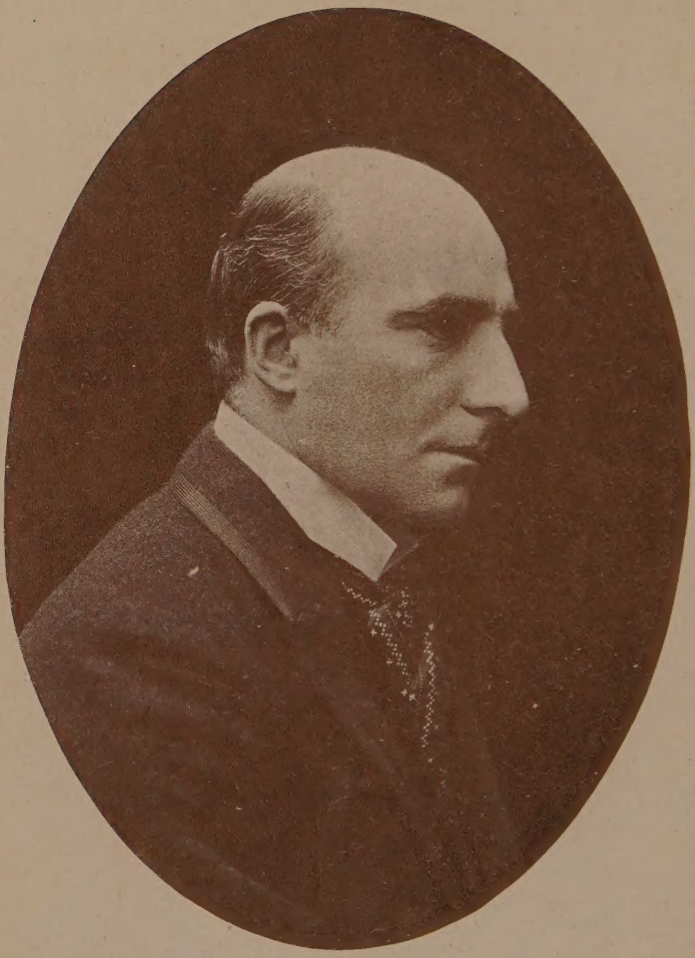
NEW YORK



Arthur Wing Pinero at the Period of the Production of "The Gay Lord Quex" and "Iris."

From a Photograph by Langfier, Ltd.

THE SOCIAL PLAYS OF
ARTHUR WING PINERO

EDITED WITH A GENERAL INTRODUCTION
AND A CRITICAL PREFACE TO EACH PLAY
BY

CLAYTON HAMILTON
MEMBER OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF ARTS AND LETTERS

GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY LIBRARY NEW YORK

THE GAY LORD QUEX

IRIS

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
681 FIFTH AVENUE
1918

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IRIS

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PREFACE

The present LIBRARY EDITION of the weightiest and most important plays of Sir Arthur Pinero has been edited with the kind co-operation of the author himself; his secretary, Miss Eveleen Mills; his London publisher, Mr. William Heinemann; and his American publishers, Messrs. Walter H. Baker & Co. of Boston. The editor is especially indebted to Mr. F. E. Chase, of Walter H. Baker & Co., for generously loaning the American copyrights of the plays that have been selected to appear in this LIBRARY EDITION.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

NEW YORK CITY: 1918.

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INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION*

I

In the GENERAL INTRODUCTION to this edition, the career of Arthur Wing Pinero was traced down to the time when he initiated the modern English drama with the production of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* on May 27th, 1893, and sought still further to stimulate the new incentive of the stage toward what Matthew Arnold called "high seriousness" by the production of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* on March 13th, 1895. Three plays were written by Pinero between the date of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* and the date of *The Gay Lord Quex;* and, though none of these is included in the present series of selections from his works, it is by no means possible for any interested student of Pinero to ignore them.

The Benefit of the Doubt followed close upon the heels of *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith,* and was first produced in London, at the Comedy Theatre, on October 16th, 1895. No other serious drama of Pinero's has occasioned such a marked divergence of critical opinion. By some of those who like the author best, and by some of those who like him least, this work has been accepted as one of the very finest of his plays; but by other critics of both classes, and also by the theatre-going public, *The Benefit of the Doubt* has been dismissed as a disappointing fabric. The play was a "failure" in London: that is to say, it ran only for about a hundred nights when it was first produced, and has not since been "revived." It was a little more successful in New York, at the old Lyceum Theatre; but, even in the United States, the merits of the piece were soon forgotten.

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The Benefit of the Doubt has not approached in popularity a dozen of Pinero's other plays: yet a sympathetic critic—Mr. H. Hamilton Fyfe—has considerately written, "I am inclined, as a matter of personal preference, to regard *The Benefit of the Doubt* as the play of Pinero's which, on the whole, has given me the most pleasure," and an antipathetic critic—Mr. George Bernard Shaw—has stated, more impetuously, that "*The Benefit of the Doubt* is worth *The Profligate, Mrs. Tanqueray,* and *Mrs. Ebbsmith* rolled into one and multiplied by ten."

It would not be fair to analyze this effervescent statement of the comparatively youthful G. B. S. in the cold light of mathematic calculation. A play that was nearly thirty times as meritorious as *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* must have been a very great drama, according to the standards of the *quondam* critic of *The Saturday Review.* But it is not, by any means, unfair to wonder why the theatre-going public did not like the play, despite the praise of Mr. Shaw.

The reason for the "failure" of *The Benefit of the Doubt* has ceased to be a theme for argument. The first act was arresting and inviting: the second act was thrilling and enthralling: but the third and last act—quite unexpectedly—was weak and disappointing. Theatre-goers have short memories; and the one impression they most vividly remember is the last impression that they have received. There is an ancient maxim in the theatre that "hell is paved with good first acts." This saw—which is familiar on the lips of every actor more than thirty years of age—is only another way of saying that many a promising play is carried down to failure by a lame and impotent conclusion.

In sheer cleverness of dramaturgic ingenuity, Pinero has seldom, if ever, surpassed the pattern of the first two acts of *The Benefit of the Doubt.* The exposition, for example, is even more ingenious, and scarcely less impressive, than that of *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray.* In the drawing-room of Mrs. Emptage—the well-to-do but vulgar mother of two "fast," attractive daughters—we wait for news from

the divorce court, in which her second daughter—Mrs. Theo Fraser—is appearing as a co-respondent, in the action of "Allingham *vs.* Allingham, Fraser intervening." The entire scene in court is revealed to us piecemeal by the successive entrances of many characters, each carrying an added bit of news. All these entrances are adequately motivated; and the effect of the sequence is to open a clear window on an all-important scene off-stage. Meanwhile, we are made intimately acquainted with the various members of Theo Fraser's family,—her mother, her sister, her brother, her uncle, and her aunt,—even though these many people are depicted mainly by the technical expedient of recording their reactions to an incident that is occurring elsewhere. At last Theo enters, accompanied by her dour husband, Alexander Fraser of Locheen. The case of Mrs. Allingham against her husband has been dismissed for lack of evidence; but, instead of exonerating Theo, the judge has reprimanded her for the indiscreetness of her conduct and has accorded her only "the benefit of the doubt." This slur upon her reputation is a heavy blow to her socially ambitious family. It is obviously desirable that she should live the situation down; and she asks her uncongenial husband to be seen with her everywhere in public, throughout the London season, in order that the social world may be impressed by their apparent reconciliation. Instead, this unadventurous and prudent Scotsman proposes that they should hurry away to the Continent and bury themselves from sight until the storm blows over. His proposal, of course, implies a doubt of Theo's innocence in the affair of "Allingham *vs.* Allingham." This is more than the harassed heroine can stand. She dismisses her unsympathetic husband, writes a note announcing her intention to quit him forever, encloses her wedding-ring, leaves the letter to be delivered to her sister, and flounces out of her mother's house. In appreciation of this episode, Mr. William Archer has remarked:—"When poor Theo, rebuffed by her husband's chilly scepticism, goes off on some manifestly harebrained errand, we divine, as do

her relatives, that she is about to commit social suicide by seeking out John Allingham; and we feel more than curiosity as to the event—we feel active concern, almost anxiety, as though our own personal interests were involved. Our anticipation is heightened, too, when we see Sir Fletcher Portwood" [Theo's uncle] "and Mrs. Cloys" [Theo's aunt] "set off upon her track. This gives us a definite point to which to look forward, while leaving the actual course of events entirely undefined. It fulfils one of the great ends of craftsmanship, in foreshadowing without forestalling an intensely interesting conjuncture of affairs."

In the second act of *The Benefit of the Doubt,* we encounter an emphatic instance of Pinero's quite extraordinary aptitude for setting the stage in such a manner as to contribute, first, to the development of the action, and, secondly, to the elucidation of the characters. "The scene"—to quote the initial stage-direction—"represents a room in Mr. Allingham's cottage at Epsom"; but the exigencies of the plot demand that this room must be adjoined by two others, from one of which it may be possible to overhear with ease every word that may be spoken on the stage, whereas the other shall be absolutely sound-proof. Pinero has carefully constructed a cottage that satisfies these architectural requirements; and, early in the act, he has rehearsed the audience to an emphatic consciousness of the antithetic facts that sounds may be heard clearly in the adjacent library but not at all in the adjoining dining-room. The manner in which this rehearsal is conducted, with the aid of a banjo that is naturally introduced, should be studied assiduously by all apprentices to the craft of making plays.

In this second act, Mrs. Allingham appears, and persuades her lonely and unanchored husband to accept at least the semblance of a reconciliation. Pinero's study of this insanely jealous but otherwise attractive woman is truly penetrating, and has been rivalled only, in our recent drama, by that similar study of feminine jealousy which was effected by the late Clyde Fitch in *The Girl With the Green Eyes.*

Olive Allingham—an amiable woman except for this one passion which turns her into a tigress—is behaving very well, until her exercise of self-abasement is interrupted by the sudden appearance of Sir Fletcher Portwood, Mrs. Cloys, and Claude Emptage [the brother of Theo Fraser]. Obviously—though they desperately talk of minor matters—they are seeking Theo; and Olive Allingham is not surprised when, a little later, a note is brought in to inform her husband that Theo Fraser is waiting outside to interview him "on a matter of business." The uninvited relatives are bundled off into the sound-proof dining-room; and Olive Allingham, thereafter, strikes a bargain with her husband, by the terms of which she claims the right to convince herself of Theo Fraser's innocence by withdrawing into the adjacent library and listening to the prospective conversation between Theo and her husband. John Allingham agrees to this device, after many hesitations that establish to the audience the fact that he is, none the less, a gentleman. Theo enters; and, by her unpremeditated conversation, she convinces the eavesdropping Olive that her past relations with John Allingham have been absolutely innocent. But Theo, after a hard day, is very tired and very hungry and very thirsty. Allingham, therefore, persuades her to partake of the refreshments of biscuits and champagne which (according to a pre-determined dramaturgic purpose) have been set upon the table at an earlier and less important point in the progress of the act. Theo accepts this invitation; and, because of the physical weakness from which she has been suffering, she becomes intoxicated by the second glass of champagne and wildly asks John Allingham to run away with her. This remark, of course, is overheard by Olive. The almost synchronous re-entrances of Theo's own relatives (who know nothing of the situation) and of the jealous wife who is her enemy (and who now knows more than is manifestly true) result in the collapse of Theo Fraser, who faints and tumbles to the floor as the curtain falls.

From the technical standpoint, this second act is exceedingly adroit; and, from the human standpoint, it offers an interesting insight into many of those problems of the perversity of human character that are most difficult to analyze. If *The Benefit of the Doubt* must finally be regarded as a failure, it is only because of the defect that has been signalized by Mr. William Archer in the following sentences:—"It should be noted that *The Benefit of the Doubt* is a three-act play, and that, in a play laid out on this scale, a whole act of anti-climax is necessarily disproportionate. It is one thing to relax the tension in the last act out of four or five; quite another thing in the last act out of three."

There seems to be no reason to deny that the third and last act of *The Benefit of the Doubt* is deeply disappointing. It was deemed so by the theatre-going public of 1895; and it has been so adjudged by a full concert of accredited critics, with the single and notable exception of Mr. Bernard Shaw. Mr. Hamilton Fyfe said in 1902, "I have never heard any one suggest a more natural or a more effective ending, however much they may have disliked the ending conceived by Mr. Pinero"; but, after the passage of more than fifteen years, this statement may be arguable.

In the last act of *The Benefit of the Doubt,* Pinero has concerned himself solely with the minor problem of re-establishing the social position of the unfortunate Theo Fraser,—a woman more sinned against than sinning; and he has solved this problem all-too-easily by dragging on, at the eleventh hour, a *deus ex machina,* in the person of the Bishop of Cloys, who promises to chaperone the heroine throughout the ensuing social season, by shielding her beneath the ægis of his own almost militant respectability. This solution of the plot is credible enough; but it misses the main point that many more important matters have been stirred up by the progress of the play than the rehabilitation of Mrs. Fraser in the eyes of the world.

At the end of *The Benefit of the Doubt,* we are asked,

as a matter of convenience, to believe that Theo will remain happily married with Alexander Fraser of Lochcheen and that John Allingham will remain happily married with Olive. Neither of these propositions can confidently be accepted. In the face of this two-fold denial of the author's invitation to accept a "happy ending", we cannot easily be foisted off by an assurance that Theo Fraser's social reputation will be reclaimed by the Bishop of Cloys.

The trouble with this last act is deep-seated, and may most easily be understood by reference to a remark of that penetrating critic of the art of fiction,—Robert Louis Stevenson. *The Benefit of the Doubt*—to quote a phrase of Stevenson's—is one of those plays that "begin to end badly." The first act plants the seeds of a calamitous eventuality; and the second act intensifies the pre-suggestion of a discommoding outcome. Therefore—in reply to the challenge that was issued in 1902 by Mr. Hamilton Fyfe—I shall venture to outline a more acceptable last act for *The Benefit of the Doubt.*

Let us imagine, first of all, that the scene which occurs between John and Theo at the end of the second act [the scene in which the intoxicated Theo is overheard by the eavesdropping Olive] should be rewritten in such a way as to convince the audience of Theo's innocence but also, at the same time, to convince Olive of Theo's guilt. This latter conviction [which is lacking in Pinero's pattern] would accentuate the motive for Theo's fainting, which marks the penultimate curtain-fall; but it also would provide for the initiation of a final act that would be truly memorable. In this final act, the audience—though taught, by this time, to believe that Theo was entitled to more than "the benefit of the doubt"—would see her rejected by her husband and deserted by her erstwhile friend, John Allingham, and would watch her wander forth to an aimless and unpredicted future, as Iris Bellamy was subsequently destined to wander forth at the conclusion of a later play by the same author; and the audience would also see the ultimate renunciation

by John Allingham of those appeals for peace advanced by his insanely jealous wife. The break between them would be final. This suggested conclusion would show both couples separated; but—despite the challenge of Mr. Fyfe—I am convinced that this ending would be "more natural and more effective."

II

After *The Benefit of the Doubt,* Pinero's next play was a lighter comedy, entitled *The Princess and the Butterfly: or, The Fantastics,* which was first produced in London, at the St. James's Theatre, on March 29th, 1897. This piece was undertaken frankly by the author in one of those vacational intervals in which he is accustomed to permit himself a rest from major labours. The theme of this fantastic composition is the longing for youth that is felt at forty years of age; and Mr. Bernard Shaw, in the pages of the *Saturday Review,* did not scruple to point out that Pinero's interest in this subject arose doubtless from the fact that he himself had recently turned forty.

In this five-act comedy, the leading characters,—Sir George Lamorant and The Princess Pannonia,—have passed the milestone of the forties and have arrived at that comfortable state of mind which permits them to arrange and to accept a marriage of friendship and convenience. But this arrangement is interrupted when the Princess is attracted to a scholarly young man whose youth is more emphatic than his scholarship, and when the hero is attracted by the charms of a wild and whirling girl who—being very young—has been wished upon him as a ward. Youth appeals to youthfulness—or even to the memory of youthfulness—as the deep calls unto the deep; and, in the end, the Princess and the Butterfly shake hands and part, to find a new access of happiness in concert with the fresh and dauntless energy of youth. This was Pinero's answer—in 1897—to

what Mr. Shaw defined as "the tragic preoccupation with the horrors of middle age."

III

Pinero's next play, *Trelawny of the "Wells"*—which was first produced at the Court Theatre on January 20th, 1898—was also a vacationary exercise; yet this minor undertaking has turned out, in retrospect, to be one of the most popular of all his many compositions. After the subsidence of its first production, *Trelawny of the "Wells"* has been "revived", again and yet again, in both London and New York; and each of these "revivals" has stimulated the currency of the piece with many companies of amateur actors.

Trelawny of the "Wells" may be classed with *The Amazons* (1893) as one of the most ingratiating of the lighter comedies of Pinero. In praise of these two compositions, it is not unfair to say that either of them might have been imagined by Sir James Barrie,—a dramatist so different, at nearly every point, from Sir Arthur Pinero that it is not at all surprising to record the fact that these two artists are fast friends and mutual admirers. In *Trelawny of the "Wells"*, Pinero has recorded faithfully the memories maintained from that period of the early eighteen-seventies when he himself was an apprentice actor on the English stage. This comedy—considered as a work of fiction—betrays, of course, the influence of Dickens; but Pinero himself has told me that nearly every character in *Trelawny of the "Wells"* was drawn directly from the life. Tom Wrench, of course, is a careful portrait of Pinero's own precursor in the English drama,—Thomas William Robertson,—who, in his own day and according to his lights, sought sedulously to record the truth and to write the sort of composition that might justly be entitled, *"Life: A Comedy."* The other "theatrical folk" of this reminiscent composition were sketched from the author's memory

of various old actors who used to take the centre of the stage at Sadler's Wells when Samuel Phelps was in his prime. The "non-theatrical folk" whose presence completes the pattern seem to have been borrowed bodily from Dickens; but there is no nobler lending-agency than this in the history of English fiction.

After resting his inventive mind with *The Princess and the Butterfly* and *Trelawny of the "Wells"*, Pinero returned—toward the close of 1898—to the composition of more serious and weighty plays: and his next two offerings —*The Gay Lord Quex* and *Iris*—are presented to the reading public in this volume.

CLAYTON HAMILTON.

THE GAY LORD QUEX

CRITICAL PREFACE*

In most of Ibsen's plays, the great Norwegian started with a thesis and subsequently invented a story that would body forth concretely an abstract and general idea. In the case of *A Doll's House,* we know for certain that this was the procedure, since the thesis was actually written down upon a scrap of paper before the author began the composition of his "modern tragedy." But, when Ibsen had completed *Hedda Gabler,* he said emphatically, "It has not been my desire to deal in this play with so-called problems. What I principally wanted to do was to depict human beings, human emotions and human destinies, upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions and principles of the present day." In other words—to quote an all-too-common phrase of current criticism—*Hedda Gabler* was not "about anything"; and indeed Mr. William Archer has confessed, in reference to this particular play of Ibsen's, "It is impossible—or so it seems to me—to extract any sort of general idea from it." Such works are disappointing to those earnest students who demand always that a serious drama shall deliver a message or preach a moral or sustain a thesis. Yet the mere ambition to "depict human beings . . . upon a groundwork of certain of the social conditions . . . of the present day" is not, by any means, to be despised.

The Gay Lord Quex, of course, is not a drama of ideas. Though it shows no other resemblance to Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler,* the present writer is reminded, in regarding it, of Mr. Archer's dictum, "It is impossible to extract any sort of general idea from it." In this particular play, Pinero

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did not seek to body forth an abstract proposition. Instead, he sought to carve clean through the various strata of English society at the outset of the twentieth century, and to render a truthful picture of the intricate cross-section thus revealed. *The Gay Lord Quex* is a "comedy of manners," because it skilfully contrasts the manners of the aristocracy with the manners of the lower classes and sets forth a tense and thrilling struggle between the different ideals of conduct that are entertained by a profligate who, despite of all deductions, is a gentleman, and a loyal and well-meaning working-woman who, despite of all additions, remains essentially a vulgar person. If the necessary element of drama is the element of contrast, no student will be able to deny that this element is raised to the *n*th power in the personal struggle between Sophy Fullgarney, "manicurist and dispenser of articles for the toilet," and "the wickedest man in London," the Marquess of Quex.

In every endeavour that is worthy of the name of art, there is such a thing as "art for art's sake." *The Gay Lord Quex* may justly be described as a piece of "play-making for the sake of play-making." This comedy is not so weighty in intention, nor so important as a "criticism of life," as half a dozen of Pinero's other compositions. Judging it upon the basis of its subject-matter, the present commentator would feel inclined to rank it no more highly than in sixth or seventh place among the collected plays of Pinero. Yet, in method, it must be ranked among the very first. In this accomplished comedy, a playwright whose most obvious title to distinction has been derived from his mastery of the difficult technique of the contemporary drama has revelled in a veritable orgy of technical dexterity. From the point of view of sheer mechanics, the famous third act of *The Gay Lord Quex* is the ablest third act in the English language [with the possible exception of the third act of *Othello*] and one of the most perfectly constructed single acts in the entire dramaturgy of the world.

Every writer who hopes to be a playwright should study

this marvellous third act,—again, again, and yet again; for there is scarcely a lesson in technique that is not taught and illustrated with supreme dexterity between the rising and the falling of the curtain on this incomparable passage of dramaturgic composition. This act climbs from climax to climax, from suspense to more profound suspense, and from surprise to still more unpredictable surprise. Step by step, this "big scene" transcends itself, and yet again transcends itself,—until the bewildered auditor begins to wonder whether dramaturgic craftsmanship shall ever offer, in the yet unfathomed future, a more acrobatic and ingenious exercise than this. To be sure, the triumph of this monumental act is merely a triumph of technique,—a sort of joyous and exuberant display of "art for art's sake." The subject-matter of the passage is basically unimportant and means little in the life of the average spectator. But, after all, it is a fine achievement to "give rise to the greatest possible amount of that peculiar kind of emotional effect, the production of which is the one great function of the theatre."

An able-minded adverse critic may often help us to appreciate the positive merits of a work of art toward which his own attitude of mind is in antipathy. In 1913, a lively and diverting book was published by Mr. P. P. Howe, a valued and respected friend of the present commentator. It was called *Dramatic Portraits,* and contained chapters dealing with Pinero, Jones, Wilde, Barrie, Shaw, St. John Hankin, Barker, Hubert Henry Davies, and Galsworthy. Throughout the composition of this book, Mr. Howe confessed in practice his adherence to a theory that the purpose of criticism is not to discover merit but to find fault. Actuated by this theory, he deliberately tried to tell the public not the best, but the worst, about the various dramatists whose work he was discussing. He approached each of his successive authors from a standpoint of attack, instead of from a standpoint of appreciation. The concluding sentence of his chapter on Pinero reads as follows:—"When, in the fullness of time and honours, Sir Arthur Pinero has

need of an epitaph, it may well be this:—He kept our theatres open." In other words, Mr. Howe's objection to Pinero is based upon the fact that Pinero's plays have been enormously successful on the stage.

In the course of this chapter on Pinero, Mr. Howe has rendered the following analysis of the comedy that now concerns us:—"*The Gay Lord Quex* is, quite simply, a play about a bedroom. It takes us two acts to get into the bedroom, and it takes us another act to get out again; but what possible doubt is there that the bedroom, and not the play, is the thing? Let us suppose the play to have been conceived somewhat after this fashion. First, take a bedroom; put into it a midnight assignation; throw in a third person; and stir thoroughly. Now it will not do to be misled by the cookery-book manner into thinking that we may take 'any bedroom': we are making a play, and not a pudding, and theatrical talent is only to be achieved by hard study, and generally by long practice. This bedroom must have at least two doors, and a boudoir will be desirable; it is by these things that we know the dramatic craftsman. Given the bedroom, whom are we to put into it? Obviously, a profligate to whom detection is dangerous, a guilty woman to whom detection is dangerous, and an innocent woman to whom detection is dangerous. Why should detection be dangerous to a professional profligate? Let us make him an elderly profligate who is turning over a new leaf, and, before becoming the husband of a charming young girl, is saying good-bye to the Duchess—yes, a Duchess, because obviously the virtue of a Duchess is the highest possible in the scale of importance. Since the third person is to be guilty of spying, plainly she must be of the lower order; but if she is of the lower order, what reason can there be for setting so much value on her virtue? She must be sympathetic; she must be taking this risk in order to shield someone very dear to her from marriage with an elderly profligate; we will make her the young lady's foster-sister, and we will add to the sense of the risk

she is taking by arranging that her own fiancé shall be sleeping in the same house. Now, at last, the scene should be secure of its emotional effect. Move one, discovery of the young person watching at first door. Move two, exit of the Duchess by second door, and summons for the young person. Move three, the profligate, alone with the young person in the bedroom, offers her two, four, five thousand pounds as the price of her silence. Move four, the profligate appeals to the young person's pity. Move five, the profligate turns the tables on the young person: he has the key, and if they are found together, what is discovery for him, a profligate, compared with discovery for her, an innocent young person with a fiancé at the other end of the corridor? Move six, desperation of the young person, and imminent triumph of the profligate. Move seven, heroic resolve of the young person to sacrifice her honour rather than the happiness of her foster-sister: she tugs at the bell-rope. Move eight, gentlemanly resolve of the profligate—who is really quite a good fellow at heart—not to bring ruin upon the young person. Move nine, the household knocking at the door—shall she tell? Move ten, let generosity meet generosity; the household be sent back to its bed; the young person, turning to the profligate, say, 'Oh, God bless you! you—you—you're a gentleman! I'll do what I can for you!' and Curtain!"

This analysis, though written in an airy mood of satire, is intelligently formulated and serves adequately to indicate the various successive steps in the construction of the celebrated third act of *The Gay Lord Quex*. It is, in fact, in some such way as this that any skilful playwright thinks out the method for producing an effect upon the stage that shall remind the auditor of life and convince him of reality. Art is none the less remarkable because its methods may be learned and may also, to some extent, be taught; and the art of Michelangelo is none the less amazing because this honest workman toiled frankly with his hands.

The Gay Lord Quex was first produced in London, at

the Globe Theatre, on April 8th, 1899, with Sir John Hare and the incomparable Irene Vanbrugh in the leading parts. On November 12th, 1900, these same artists repeated their original performances at the Criterion Theatre in New York. It was upon this latter occasion that *The Gay Lord Quex* was first witnessed by the present writer. In my professional capacity as a dramatic critic, I must have attended more than a thousand plays since 1900; yet I still remember with especial vividness the overpowering impression produced upon the first-night audience by the thrilling climax of *The Gay Lord Quex*. This *première* is one of the very few undoubted "great occasions" that I am able to recall from a life-time of assiduous attendance at the theatre. At the close of the performance, I encountered in the lobby Professor Brander Matthews, who said, in the enthusiasm of the moment, "We have just witnessed the ablest English comedy that has been composed since *The School for Scandal"*; and this sudden verdict may still be accepted seriously if the reader will remember that *The Gay Lord Quex* was originally launched in 1899 and antedated many other notable endeavours in the delicate and difficult field of the contemporary "comedy of manners."

The Gay Lord Quex was "revived" in New York by Mr. John D. Williams on November 12th, 1917—precisely seventeen years after the date of the original performance—with Mr. John Drew and Miss Margaret Illington in the leading rôles; and this "revival" has been successfully exhibited, in most of the leading cities of the United States, throughout the course of the theatre-season of 1917-1918.

Now that *The Gay Lord Quex* has been familiar to most students of the technique of the modern drama for nearly twenty years, it is easy enough to see that the first two acts are devoted solely to the practical task of preparing for the apparently unpremeditated launching of the big third act, and that the last act is devoted solely to the practical task of cutting unobtrusively the many knots intrinsically tied at the climax of the plot. This play follows the same pattern

that had been developed previously by Pinero in *The Second Mrs. Tarqueray* and *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith*,—that is to say, a four-act pattern with the climax set assiduously at the end of the penultimate act. In practice, this framework has subsequently been renounced—for many reasons, most of which are logical—in favour of a three-act pattern, with a climax placed, by calculation, in the middle of the final act.

The trouble with the four-act pattern—which has lately fallen into disrepute—was that it necessitated a concentration of attention upon the "big scene" that was delivered arbitrarily at the conclusion of the third act. The dominance of this "big scene" imposed a comparative lack of interest upon the scenes that led up to it and led away from it. Whether or not it is worth while to stake the success of a play upon the appeal of a single "big scene" at the climax of a four-act pattern is a question that—within the last two decades—has repeatedly been answered in the negative. In consequence, *The Gay Lord Quex* must now be studied as a fine example of sheer technical accomplishment in accordance with the terms of a pattern that, in recent years, has been discarded by the majority of contemporary craftsmen.

That clever master of the art of composition, Wilkie Collins, used to say, "Make 'em laugh: make 'em weep; make 'em wait." Throughout the course of two preparatory acts, Pinero has deliberately "made us wait" for the exciting situation that marks the climax of *The Gay Lord Quex*. His first act was extremely difficult to plan, and may be accepted as a notable instance of his skill in setting the stage in such a way as to contribute positively to the exposition of the action. It was necessary to decide upon a place where a working-girl [imaged to be virtuous] and where a gentleman [imaged to be vicious] might meet conventionally upon common ground—a place, moreover, that would offer equal hospitality to a mid-Victorian Countess and to several representatives of the vulgar middle class.

This problem was solved by the felicitous invention of the "Establishment of Sophy Fullgarney, Manicurist and Dispenser of Articles for the Toilet, 185 New Bond Street,"—an establishment that could be readily frequented by such contrasted characters as Valma, a "professional palmist," and Sir Chichester Frayne, an almost professional philanderer. For contrast, the second act is set in the Italian Garden of the aristocratic Lady Owbridge, where Sophy Fullgarney may be shown out of her element after we have seen her in her own habitual environment. In these two preparatory acts, we are invited to study, face to face, the different conditions of the higher and the lower classes, and the different ideals of conduct that are thereby predetermined for aristocrats like Quex, whose morals are indubitably shaky, and for honest representatives of the insurgent proletariat like Sophy, who, despite her militant respectability, has a disconcerting habit of dragging up her garters before going forth to encounter an unhabitual adventure.

The first and second acts of *The Gay Lord Quex*—though scarcely more than moderately interesting in themselves—are planted full of many indications of the mine that is predestined for explosion at the climax of the great third act; and these indications should be studied carefully by all apprentices to the craft of making plays. Any exercise of "art for art's sake" will be most appreciated by practitioners of the art that is exemplified. Such a fabric as has been set forth by Pinero in the patterning of *The Gay Lord Quex* will seem most interesting to those who—in the ever memorable phrase of Edgar Allan Poe—are able to "contemplate it with a kindred art." *The Gay Lord Quex* is not, perhaps, a work of lasting literature; but it is at least a play for playwrights, and it marks a technical achievement which no future student of the craft of making plays can afford to ignore. In the undertaking of this project, Pinero has essayed a hard task, and has fulfilled it without faltering; and thereby, in the eyes of all good workmen, he has "acquired merit."

C. H.

THE
GAY LORD QUEX
A COMEDY IN FOUR ACTS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

THE MARQUESS OF QUEX
SIR CHICHESTER FRAYNE (Governor of Uumbos, West Coast of Africa)
CAPTAIN BASTLING
"VALMA," OTHERWISE FRANK POLLITT (a Professional Palmist)
THE DUCHESS OF STROOD
JULIA, COUNTESS OF OWBRIDGE
MRS. JACK EDEN
MURIEL EDEN (her sister-in-law)
SOPHY FULLGARNEY (a Manicurist)
MISS MOON
MISS HUDDLE
MISS CLARIDGE
MISS LIMBIRD
(her assistants)
A YOUNG LADY AND OTHER PATRONS OF MISS FULLGARNEY
SERVANTS AT FAUNCEY COURT

The FIRST ACT
Establishment of Sophy Fullgarney, Manicurist and Dispenser of Articles for the Toilet, 185 New Bond Street.

(*Afternoon*)

The SECOND ACT
At Lady Owbridge's. The "Italian Garden," Fauncey Court, Richmond.

(*Evening*)

The THIRD ACT
A Boudoir and Bedroom at Fauncey Court.

(*Night*)

The FOURTH ACT
In Bond Street Again.

(*The following day*)

The action of the Play is comprised within the space of twenty-four hours.

THE GAY LORD QUEX

Original cast, as first disclosed at the Globe Theatre, April 8th, 1899.

The Marquess of Quex	*Mr. John Hare*
Sir Chichester Frayne (Governor of Uumbos, West Coast of Africa) .	*Mr. Gilbert Hare*
Captain Bastling . . .	*Mr. Charles Cherry*
"Valma," otherwise Frank Pollitt (a Professional Palmist)	*Mr. Frank Gillmore*
The Duchess of Strood .	*Miss Fortescue*
Julia, Countess of Owbridge	*Miss Fanny Coleman*
Mrs. Jack Eden . . .	*Miss Mona K. Oram*
Muriel Eden (her sister-in-law)	*Miss Mabel Terry-Lewis*
Sophy Fullgarney (a Manicurist)	*Miss Irene Vanbrugh*
Miss Moon, Miss Huddle, Miss Claridge, Miss Limpird (her assistants)	*Miss Laura McGilvray*, *Miss Doris Templeton*, *Miss Victoria Addison*, *Miss Marion Dolby*
A Young Lady and other Patrons of Miss Fullgarney	*Miss K. Carpenter*, *Mrs. Copleston*, *Miss B. Coleman*, *Mr. Richard Lambart and Mr. Hubert Evelyn*
Servants at Fauncey Court	*Mr. Abbott and Mr. Lennox*

THE
GAY LORD QUEX

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents a manicure establishment in New Bond Street. It is a front room upon the first floor with three french-windows affording a view of certain buildings on the east side of the street. On the left, furthest from the spectator, is a wide, arched opening, apparently leading to another apartment, in which is the door giving entrance to the rooms from the staircase. Nearer, there is another french-window, opening on to an expanse of "leads" and showing the exterior of the wall of the further room above-mentioned. From the right, above the middle window, runs an ornamental partition, about nine feet in height, with panels of opaque glass. This partition extends more than half-way across the room, then runs forward for some distance, turns off at a sharp angle, and terminates between the arched opening and the window on the left. That part of the partition running from right to left is closed on its left side and forms, therefore, a separate room or compartment. Facing the audience, on the right, is a door admitting to this compartment; and, on the left, also in the partition opposite the windows on the right, is an opening with a looped-back portière. The space between this opening and the further room forms a narrow anteroom, containing articles of furniture visible through the opening. Mirrors are affixed to

the right wall, between the lower and the middle window and between the middle window and the partition, while on the left, between the window and the partition, is another mirror. A number of business cards are stuck in the frames of the mirrors. On the right, before each of the two lower windows, turned from the spectators, is a capacious arm-chair, made in cane open-work. Attached to the arms of these chairs are little screens—also made of cane—shielding, in a measure, the occupants of the chairs from observation. Upon both the right and left arms of these chairs are circular frames in cane, shaped to receive bowls of water. Above each of the screen-chairs stands a smaller chair, set to face the larger one; and beside the small chair, on its right hand, is a low table upon which are arranged the instruments and toilet necessaries employed in the process of manicure. On the right, between the window and the partition, is a three-cornered what-not, on which are set out packets of soap and of powder and other articles of the toilet. At the further end of the room, in the centre, stands a desk laden with account-books; and, above the desk, its back against the partition, is a chair. On the right is a hat-and-umbrella stand. Nearer, in the centre, is a large circular table on which are displayed bottles of scent and liquid soap, cases of instruments for manicure, and some wooden bowls of bath-soap with lather brushes. On the right and left are ordinary chairs. Placed against the partition on the left, and facing the audience, is a cabinet, making a display similar to that upon the what-not. Nearer, on the left, there is another screen-chair set to face the audience; below it is a smaller seat and, by the side of the smaller seat, another little table with manicure tools, etc. Some framed photographs of ladies hang against the wood-work of the partition

and in the wall-spaces; and in the lower and middle windows, on the right, bird-cages are suspended.

The light is that of a bright day in June.

[*On the right* MISS CLARIDGE *and* MISS HUDDLE *are in the final stages of manicuring two smart-looking men. The men occupy the screen-chairs; the manicurists—comely girls in black frocks—sit, facing the men, upon the smaller seats. On the left* MISS MOON *is rougeing and varnishing the nails of a fashionably dressed young lady whose maid is seated at the table in the centre.* MISS LIMBIRD *is at the desk, deep in accounts.*]

MISS MOON.

[*To the young lady.*] You won't have them *too* red, will you?

YOUNG LADY.

Not too red—nicely flushed.

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

[*Examining his nails critically as he rises.*] I say though, that's a vast improvement!

MISS CLARIDGE.

Getting more shapely, aren't they?

FIRST GENTLEMAN.

Thanks awfully.

[*He pays* MISS LIMBIRD, *stands talking to her for a while, and ultimately strolls away through the opening in the partition. After putting her table in order,* MISS CLARIDGE *goes out the same way, carrying her bowl of water and towel.*]

MISS MOON.

[*To the young lady.*] Have you had your hand read yet, madam, by any of these palmists?

YOUNG LADY.

Heavens, yes! I've been twice to that woman Bernstein, and I don't know how often to Chiron.

MISS MOON.

Ah, you ought to try Valma.

YOUNG LADY.

Valma?

MISS MOON.

He's the latest. Ladies are flocking to him.

YOUNG LADY.

Really?

MISS MOON.

Yes. Such taking manners.

YOUNG LADY.

Where does he——?

MISS MOON.

186—next door. [*Indicating the window on the left.*] You can see his waiting-room from that window.

YOUNG LADY.

Is he a guinea or half a guinea?

MISS MOON.

Oh, he's a guinea.

YOUNG LADY.

That's a bore.

MISS MOON.

Ah, but consider, madam—his rooms are draped from ceiling to floor in blue velvet. Blue velvet! fancy! Not that I've had the privilege of viewing them myself; Miss F. is our authority.

YOUNG LADY.

Miss F.?

MISS MOON.

I beg your pardon—Miss Fullgarney. Valma is quite neighbourly with Miss Fullgarney.

[*A door-gong sounds—as it does every time any one enters or quits the establishment—signifying that the first gentleman has departed.*]

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

[*Rising.*]—Much obliged. [*Putting a tip into* MISS HUDDLE'S *hand.*] For yourself.

MISS HUDDLE.

Much obliged to *you.*

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

You're a fresh face here?

MISS HUDDLE.

Yes; I used to be with Mossu and Madame Roget in Mortimer Street.

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

I'll ask for you next time. What name?

MISS HUDDLE.

Miss Huddle.

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

Huddle?

MISS HUDDLE.

Well, p'r'aps you'd better ask for Miss Hud-delle; I fancy Miss Fullgarney is going to alter me to that.

SECOND GENTLEMAN.

[*With a nod.*] Goo'bye.

MISS HUDDLE.

Good-day, sir.

[*He pays* MISS LIMBIRD *and goes out. The maid rises and hands the young lady her gloves.*]

MISS MOON.

[*Taking a card from the mirror.*] Would you like a card of Valma's, madam, just to remind you?

YOUNG LADY.

[*Accepting the card and reading it.*] "Valma, Palmist. Professor of the Sciences of Chiromancy and Chirognomy. 186, New Bond Street." [*Giving the card to her maid.*] Keep that. [*The door-gong sounds.*]

MISS MOON.

[*Opening a window.*] Look, madam. That's one of his rooms; the window there—the open one——

YOUNG LADY.

Yes, I see. Thanks. Good morning.

MISS MOON.

Good morning.

[*The young lady pays* MISS LIMBIRD *and goes, followed by her maid.*]

MISS HUDDLE.

[*To* MISS MOON.] What time is it, dear?

MISS MOON.

[*Putting her table in order.*] Half-past one. Lunch time.

MISS HUDDLE.

Thought so; I've sech a vacancy.

[MISS HUDDLE *goes out, carrying her bowl and towel, as* FRANK POLLITT—"VALMA"—*appears at the window on the left—a well, if rather showily, dressed young fellow, wearing a frock coat, white waistcoat, and patent-leather boots. He is handsome in a commonplace way and, though stilted and self-conscious, earnest in speech and bearing.*]

POLLITT.

[*Looking in.*] Excuse me——

MISS MOON.

[*Startled.*] Oh! oh, Mr. Valma!

POLLITT.

[*Entering.*] Is Miss Fullgarney in the way?

MISS MOON.

[*Gazing at him in modest admiration.*] She's with a lady in the private room, Mr. Valma.

[*The door in the partition opens.*]

SOPHY.

[*From the private room.*] Oh, no, madam, I promise I won't forget. Certainly not. I take too much interest in your daughter's nails for that.

MISS MOON.

This is her.

[*A middle-aged lady enters from the private room followed by* SOPHY FULLGARNEY. *The customer pays at the desk while* SOPHY *rattles on.* SOPHY *is a pretty, elegant, innocently vulgar, fascinating young woman of six-and-twenty.*]

SOPHY.

[*With the air of the proprietress of a prosperous establishment.*] Oh, yes, it did slip my memory to come on Thursday, didn't it? The truth is I had a most racking head, a thing I never have—well, I oughtn't to say never have, ought I? [*To* MISS LIMBIRD.] Now, Miss Limbird, see that two pots of Crème de Mimosa are posted to Mrs. Arment, Carlos Place; and book me, please—*me*—you thoroughly understand?—to attend upon Miss Arment to-morrow evening at seven. [*Accompanying the customer, who now withdraws.*] To-morrow evening at seven—without fail. [*Raising her voice.*] The door, Miss Claridge. Good morning, madam. Good afternoon.

[*The door-gong sounds.*]

SOPHY.

Come, girls, you can get to your lunches.

[MISS LIMBIRD *leaves her desk and goes out.*]

MISS MOON.

Here's Mr. Valma, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*With a little gasp.*] Mr. Valma! [*Approaching him.*] How do you do?

POLLITT.

[*Advancing.*] Pardon me for the liberty I have taken in again crossing the leads.

SOPHY.

[*Looking away from him.*] No liberty at all.

POLLITT.

I desire a few words with you, Miss Fullgarney, and it struck me that at this time of the day——

SOPHY.

Yes, there's nothing doing here just at lunch-time.

POLLITT.

Perhaps you would graciously allow me to converse with you while you——

SOPHY.

[*Regaining her self-possession.*] Oh, I had my lunch an hour ago; I came over so ravenous. [*Going to* MISS MOON, *who is still lost in admiration of* POLLITT—*in a whisper.*] Be off, child. Don't stand staring at Mr. Valma.

MISS MOON.

[*In* SOPHY'S *ear.*] I think I've got him another!

SOPHY.

Shut up!

[MISS MOON *withdraws, with her bowl and towel.*]

SOPHY.

[*To* POLLITT.] Did you catch what she said? Oh, it doesn't matter if you did; you know we are all working for you, like niggers.

POLLITT.

[*Tenderly.*] Ah!

SOPHY.

Not a customer leaves my place without having heard your name mentioned. My girls are regular bricks.

POLLITT.

[*Approaching her.*] And what are you?

SOPHY.

[*Looking away again.*] Oh, I do no more than any of the others.

POLLITT.

Do you expect me to believe that? you, their queen! No, it is *you* who have helped me to steer my bark into the flowing waters of popularity.

SOPHY.

[*Nervously.*] Extremely pleased, I—I'm sure. [*He is close beside her; a cork is drawn loudly. They part, startled and disturbed. She goes to the opening in the partition, raising her voice slightly.*] Girls, can't you draw your corks a shade quieter? Nice if somebody was coming upstairs!

MISS LIMBIRD.

[*In the distance.*] Very sorry, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*To* POLLITT, *as she toys with the articles upon the circular table.*] Everything is so up this weather. It's their lime-juice champagne.

POLLITT.

[*By her side again—suddenly.*] I love you!

SOPHY.

Oh, Mr. Valma!

POLLITT.

I love you! Ever since I had the honor of being presented to you by Mr. Salmon, the picture-dealer next door, I have thought of you, dreamt of you, constantly. [*She*

brushes past him; he follows her.] Miss Fullgarney, you will accord me permission to pay you my addresses?

SOPHY.

[*In a flutter.*] I—I am highly flattered and complimented, Mr. Valma, by your proposal——

POLLITT.

[*Taking her hand.*] Flattered—no!

SOPHY.

[*Withdrawing her hand.*] Oh, but please wait!

POLLITT.

Wait!

SOPHY.

I mean, I certainly couldn't dream of accepting the attentions of any man until he fully understood——

POLLITT.

Understood what?

SOPHY.

[*Summoning all her dignity.*] Oh, I'll be perfectly straight with you—until he fully understood that, whatever my station in life may be now, I have risen from rather—well, I may say *very* small beginnings.

POLLITT.

What matters that?

SOPHY.

Oh, but I beg your pardon—it does. [*Relaxing.*] I am sure I can depend on you not to give me away all over the place?

POLLITT.

Miss Fullgarney——!

SOPHY.

[*After a cautious glance round.*] You know, Mr. Valma, I was always a self-willed, independent sort of a girl—a handful, they used to call me; and when father died I determined to have done with my stepmother, and to come to London at any price. I was seventeen then.

POLLITT.

Yes?

SOPHY.

Oh, it's nothing to be ashamed of, really; still, I did begin life in town [*with an uneasy little laugh and a toss of the head*]—you'd hardly believe it!—as a nursery-maid.

POLLITT.

H'm! I am aware that is not considered——

SOPHY.

I should think not! Oh, of course, in time I rose to be Useful Maid, and then Maid. I've been lady's-maid in some excellent houses. And when I got sick of maiding I went to Dundas's opposite, and served three years at the hairdressing; that's an extremely refined position, I needn't say. And then some kind friends routed me out [*surveying the room proudly*] and put me into this.

POLLITT.

Then why bestow a second thought upon your beginnings?

SOPHY.

No, I suppose I oughtn't to. Nobody can breathe a word against my respectability. All the same, I am quite aware that it mightn't be over-pleasant for a gentleman to remember that his wife was once—[*sitting in the screen-chair*] well, a servant.

POLLITT.

[*By her chair.*] It would not weigh on my mind if you had been kitchen-maid [*pointing out of the window*] at Fletcher's Hotel. [*Looking about him.*] It's this business I don't care for.

SOPHY.

This business!

POLLITT.

For *you*. If you did no more than glide about your rooms, superintending your young ladies! [*Sitting, facing her.*] But I hate the idea of your sitting here, or there, holding some man's hand in yours!

SOPHY.

[*Suddenly ablaze.*] Do you! [*Pointing out of the window.*] Yet you sit there, day after day, and hold women's hands in yours!

POLLITT.

[*Eagerly.*] You are jealous of me?

SOPHY.

[*Panting.*] A little.

POLLITT.

[*Going down upon one knee.*] Ah, you do love me!

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] Fondly.

POLLITT.

And you will be my wife?

SOPHY.

Yes.

POLLITT.

[*Embracing her.*] My dearest!

SOPHY.

Not yet! suppose the girls saw you!

POLLITT.

Let all the world see us!

SOPHY.

[*Submissively, laying her cheek upon his brow.*] Oh, but I wish—and yet I don't wish——

POLLITT.

What?

SOPHY.

That you were not so much my superior in every way.

POLLITT.

[*In an altered voice.*] Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*In a murmur, her eyes closed.*] Eh-h-h?

POLLITT.

I have had my early struggles too.

SOPHY.

You, love?

POLLITT.

Yes. If you should ever hear——

SOPHY.

Hear——?

POLLITT.

That until recently I was a solicitor's clerk——

SOPHY.

[*Slightly surprised.*] A solicitor's clerk?

POLLITT.

You would not turn against me?

SOPHY.

Ah, as if——!

POLLITT.

You know my real name is Pollitt—Frank Toleman Pollitt?

SOPHY.

I've heard it isn't really Valma. [*With a little shiver.*] Never mind that.

POLLITT.

But I shall be Frank to you henceforth, shan't I?

SOPHY.

Oh, no, no! always Valma to me—[*dreamily*] my Valma. [*Their lips meet in a prolonged kiss. Then the door-gong sounds.*] Get up! [*They rise in a hurry. She holds his hand tightly.*] Wait and see who it is. Oh, don't go for a minute! stay a minute!

[*They separate; he stands looking out upon the leads.* MISS CLARIDGE *enters, preceding the* MARQUESS OF QUEX *and* SIR CHICHESTER FRAYNE. LORD QUEX *is forty-eight, keen-faced, and bright-eyed, faultless in dress, in manner debonair and charming.* FRAYNE *is a genial wreck of about five-and-forty—the lean and shrivelled remnant of a once good-looking man. His face is yellow and puckered, his hair prematurely silvered, his moustache palpably touched-up.*]

QUEX.

[*Perceiving* SOPHY *and approaching her.*] How are you, Miss Fullgarney?

SOPHY.

[*Respectfully but icily.*] Oh, how do you do, my lord?
[MISS CLARIDGE *withdraws.* FRAYNE *comes forward, eyeing* SOPHY *with interest.*]

QUEX.

My aunt—Lady Owbridge—has asked me to meet her here at two o'clock. Her ladyship is lunching at a tea-shop close by—bunning is a more fitting expression—with Mrs. Eden and Miss Eden.

SOPHY.

[*Gladly.*] Miss Muriel!

QUEX.

Yes, I believe Miss Muriel will place her pretty fingertips in your charge [*partly to* FRAYNE] while I escort Lady Owbridge and Mrs. Jack to view this new biblical picture—[*with a gesture*] a few doors up. What is the subject?—Moses in the Bulrushes. [*To* FRAYNE.] Come with us, Chick.

SOPHY.

It's not quite two, my lord; if you like, you've just time to run in next door and have your palm read.

QUEX.

My palm——?

SOPHY.

By this extraordinary palmist everybody is talking about —Valma.

QUEX.

[*Pleasantly.*] One of these fortune-telling fellows, eh? [*Shaking his head.*] I prefer the gipsy on Epsom race-course.

SOPHY.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh, indeed! [*Curtly.*] Please take a seat.

[*She flounces up to the desk and busies herself there vindictively.*]

FRAYNE.

[*To* QUEX.] Who's that gal? what's her name?

QUEX.

Fullgarney; a protégée of the Edens. Her father was bailiff to old Mr. Eden, at their place in Norfolk.

FRAYNE.

Rather alluring—eh, what?

QUEX.

[*Wincing.*] Don't, Chick!

FRAYNE.

My dear Harry, it is perfectly proper, now that you are affianced to Miss Eden, and have reformed, all that sort of thing—it is perfectly proper that you should no longer observe pretty women too narrowly.

QUEX.

Obviously.

FRAYNE.

But do bear in mind that your old friend is not so pledged. Recollect that *I* have been stuck for the last eight years, with intervals of leave, on the West Coast of Africa, nursing malaria——

QUEX.

[*Severely.*] Only malaria?

FRAYNE.

[*Mournfully.*] There is nothing else to nurse, dear Harry, on the West Coast of Africa. [*Glancing at* SOPHY.] Yes, by gad, that gal is alluring!

QUEX.

[*Walking away.*] Tssh! you're a bad companion, Chick!

[*He goes to the window and looks into the street.* FRAYNE *joins him.* SOPHY, *seizing her opportunity, comes down to* POLLITT.]

SOPHY.

[*To* POLLITT.] Valma, dear, you see that man?

POLLITT.

Which of the two?

SOPHY.

The dark one. That's Lord Quex—the wickedest man in London.

POLLITT.

He looks it. [*Jealously.*] Have you ever cut his nails?

SOPHY.

No, love, no. Oh, I've heard such tales about him!

POLLITT.

What tales?

SOPHY.

I'll tell you [*demurely*] when we're married. And the worst of it is, he is engaged to Miss Eden.

POLLITT.

Who is she?

SOPHY.

Miss Muriel Eden, my foster-sister; the dearest friend I have in the world—except you, sweetheart. It was Muriel and her brother Jack who put me into this business. And now my darling is to be sacrificed to that gay old thing——!

[*The door-gong sounds;* QUEX *turns expectantly.*]

POLLITT.

If Miss Eden is your foster-sister——

SOPHY.

Yes, of course, she's six-and-twenty. But the poor girl has been worried into it by her sister-in-law, Mrs. Jack, whose one idea is Title and Position. Title and Position with that old rake by her side!

[MISS LIMBIRD *enters, preceding* CAPTAIN BASTLING *—a smart, soldierly-looking man of about eight-and-twenty.* MISS LIMBIRD *returns to her seat at the desk.*]

SOPHY.

[*Seeing* BASTLING.] My gracious!

POLLITT.

What's the matter?

QUEX.

[*Recognising* BASTLING *and greeting him.*] Hallo, Napier! how are you?

BASTLING.

[*Shaking hands with* QUEX.] Hallo, Quex!

QUEX.

What are you doing here?

SOPHY.

[*To* POLLITT.] Phew! I hope to goodness Lord Quex won't tumble to anything.

POLLITT.

Tumble—to what?

[QUEX *introduces* BASTLING *to* FRAYNE.]

SOPHY.

You don't understand; it's Captain Bastling—the man Muriel is really fond of.

POLLITT.

What, while she's engaged——?

SOPHY.

[*With clenched hands.*] Yes, and she shall marry him too, my darling shall, if I can help to bring it about.

POLLITT.

You?

SOPHY.

Bless 'em, I don't know how they'd contrive without me!

POLLITT.

Contrive——?

SOPHY.

[*Fondly.*] You old stupid! whenever Muriel is coming to be manicured she sends Captain Bastling a warning overnight [*squeezing* POLLITT's *arm, roguishly*]; this kind of thing—"My heart is heavy and my nails are long. To-morrow—three-thirty." Ha, ha, ha!

POLLITT.

Dearest, let me advise you——

SOPHY.

[*Her hand upon his lips.*] Ah, don't lecture! [BASTLING *saunters forward to attract* SOPHY'S *attention.*] Oh——! [*To* POLLITT, *hurriedly.*] Go now. Pop in again by-and-by. [*Caressingly.*] Um-m-m! my love!

[POLLITT *goes out by the window.*]

SOPHY.

[*Joining* BASTLING—*formally.*] Good-day, Captain Bastling.

BASTLING.

Good-afternoon, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*Dropping her voice.*] She'll be here in a minute.

BASTLING.

[*In low tones—making a show of examining the articles on the circular table.*] Yes, I had a note from her this morning. [*Glancing at* QUEX.] Confounded nuisance—!

SOPHY.

[*Pretending to display the articles.*] It's all right; he's got to take Lady Owbridge and Mrs. Jack Eden to look at Moses in the Bulrushes—a picture——

BASTLING.

Sophy—I've bad news.

SOPHY.

No! what?

BASTLING.

My regiment is ordered to Hong-Kong.

SOPHY.

Great heavens! when are you off?

BASTLING.

In a fortnight.

SOPHY.

Oh, my poor darling!

BASTLING.

I must see her again to-morrow. I've something serious to propose to her.

SOPHY.

[*Half in eagerness, half in fright.*] Have you?

BASTLING.

But to-morrow it must be alone, Sophy; I can't say what I have to say in a few hasty whispers, with all your girls flitting about—and perhaps a customer or two here. Alone!

SOPHY.

Without me?

BASTLING.

Surely you can trust us. To-morrow at twelve. You'll manage it?

SOPHY.

How can I—alone?

BASTLING.

You're our only friend. Think!

SOPHY.

[*Glancing suddenly toward the left.*] Valma's rooms!

[FRAYNE *has wandered to the back of the circular table, and, through his eyeglass, is again observing* SOPHY. QUEX *now joins him.*]

BASTLING.

[*Perceiving them—To* SOPHY.] Look out!

SOPHY.

[*Taking a bottle from his hand—raising her voice.*] You'll receive the perfume in the course of the afternoon. [*Replacing the bottle upon the table.*] Shall I do your nails?

BASTLING.

Thanks.

[*They move away. He takes his place in the screen-chair; she sits facing him. During the process of manicuring they talk together earnestly.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Eyeing* SOPHY.] Slim but shapely. Slim but shapely.

[MISS MOON *enters, with a bowl of water. Having adjusted the bowl upon the arm of the screen-chair, she retires.*]

FRAYNE.

There's another of 'em. Plain. [*Watching* MISS MOON *as she goes out.*] I don't know—rather alluring. [*Finding* QUEX *by his side.*] Beg your pardon.

QUEX.

Didn't hear you.

FRAYNE.

Glad of it. At the same time, old friend, you will forgive me for remarking that a man's virtuous resolutions must be—ha, ha!—somewhat feeble, hey?—when he flinches at the mere admiration of beauty on the part of a pal, connoisseur though that pal undoubtedly is.

QUEX.

Oh, my dear Chick, my resolutions are firm enough.

FRAYNE.

[*Dubiously.*] H'm!

QUEX.

And my prudery is consistent with the most laudable intentions, I assure you. But the fact is, dear chap, I go in fear and trembling——

FRAYNE.

Ah!

QUEX.

No, no, not for my strength of mind—fear lest any trivial act of mine, however guileless; the most innocent glance in the direction of a decent-looking woman; should be misinterpreted by the good ladies in whose hands I have placed myself—especially Aunt Julia. You remember Lady Owbridge?

FRAYNE.

Why did you intrust yourself——?

QUEX.

My one chance! [*Taking* FRAYNE *to the table, against which they both lean shoulder to shoulder—his voice falling into a strain of tenderness.*] Chick, when I fell in love with Miss Eden——

FRAYNE.

[*In sentimental retrospection.*] Fell in love! what memories are awakened by the dear old phrase!

QUEX.

[*Dryly.*] Yes. Will you talk about your love-affairs, Chick, or shall I——?

FRAYNE.

Certainly—you. Go on, Harry.

QUEX.

When I proposed marriage to Miss Eden—it was at the hunt-ball at Stanridge——

FRAYNE.

[*His eyes sparkling.*] Did you select a retired corner —with flowers—by any chance?

QUEX.

There *were* flowers.

FRAYNE.

I know—*I* know! Nearly twenty years ago, and the faint scent of the *Gardenia Florida* remains in my nostrils!

QUEX.

Quite so. Would *you* like to——?

FRAYNE.

[*Sitting.*] No, no—you. Excuse me. You go on.

QUEX.

[*Sitting on the edge of the table, looking down upon* FRAYNE.] When I proposed to Miss Eden I was certain —even while I was stammering it out—I was certain that my infernal evil character——

FRAYNE.

Ah, yes. I've always been a dooced deal more artful than you, Harry, over my little *amours*. [*Chuckling.*] Ha, ha! devilish cunning!

QUEX.

And I was right. Her first words were, "Think of your life; how can you ask this of me?"—her first words and her last, that evening. I was desperate, Chick, for I——well, I'm hit, you know.

FRAYNE.

What did you do?

QUEX.

Came to town by the first train in the morning—drove straight off to Richmond, to my pious aunt. Found her in bed with asthma; *I* got her up. And I almost went down on my knees to her, Chick.

FRAYNE.

Not really?

QUEX.

I did—old man as I am! no, I'm not old.

FRAYNE.

Forty-eight. Ha, ha! I'm only forty-five.

QUEX.

But you've had malaria——

FRAYNE.

Dry up, Harry!

QUEX.

So we're quits. Well, down on my marrow-bones I went, metaphorically, and there and then I made my vows to old Aunt Julia, and craved her help; and she dropped tears on me, Chick, like a mother. And the result was that within a month I became engaged to Miss Eden.

FRAYNE.

The young lady soon waived her——

QUEX.

[*Getting off the table.*] I beg your pardon—the young lady did nothing of the kind. But with Aunt Julia's aid I showed 'em all that it was a genuine case of done with the old life—a real, genuine instance. [*Balancing upon the back of the chair.*] I've sold my house in Norfolk Street.

FRAYNE.

You'll want one.

QUEX.

[*Gravely.*] Not that one—for Muriel. [*Brightly.*] And I'm living sedately at Richmond, under Aunt Julia's wing. Muriel is staying at Fauncey Court too just now; she's up from Norfolk for the Season, chaperoned by Mrs. Jack. [*Sitting, nursing his knee, with a sigh of content.*] Ah! after all, it's very pleasant to be a good boy.

FRAYNE.

When is it to take place?

QUEX.

At the end of the year; assuming, of course——

FRAYNE.

That you continue to behave prettily? [QUEX *assents, with a wave of the hand.*] The slightest lapse on your part——?

QUEX.

Impossible.

FRAYNE.

But it would——?

QUEX.

[*A little impatiently.*] Naturally.

FRAYNE.

Well, six months pass quickly—everywhere but on the West Coast of Africa.

QUEX.

And then—you shall be my best man, Chick, if you're still home.

FRAYNE.

[*Rising.*] Hah! I never thought——

QUEX.

[*Rising.*] No; I who always laughed at marriage as a dull depravity permitted to the respectable classes! I who always maintained that man's whole duty to woman —meaning his mistresses—that a man's duty to a woman is liberally discharged when he has made a settlement on her, or stuck her into his Will! [*Blowing the ideas from him.*] Phugh!

[*He goes to the little table, and examines the objects upon it.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Following him.*] Talking of—ah—mistresses, I suppose you've——?

QUEX.

Oh, yes, they're all——

FRAYNE.

Made happy and comfortable?

QUEX.

've done my utmost.

FRAYNE.

Mrs.——?

QUEX.

[*Rather irritably.*] I say, all of them.

FRAYNE.

No trouble with Lady——?

QUEX.

No, no, no, no.

FRAYNE.

What about the little Duchess? [QUEX *pauses in his examination of a nail-clipper.*] Eh?

QUEX.

[*Turning to him, slightly embarrassed.*] Odd that you should mention her.

FRAYNE.

Why?

QUEX.

She's staying at Fauncey Court also.

FRAYNE.

The Duchess!

QUEX.

She proposed herself for a visit. I dared not raise any objection, for her reputation's sake; the ladies would have suspected at once. You're one of the few, Chick, who ever got an inkling of that business.

FRAYNE.

Very awkward!

QUEX.

No. She's behaving admirably. [*Thoughtfully—with a wry face.*] Of course she was always a little romantic and sentimental.

FRAYNE.

By gad though, what an alluring woman!

QUEX.

[*Shortly.*] Perhaps.

FRAYNE.

Ho, come! you don't mean to tell me——?

QUEX.

[*With dignity.*] Yes, I do—upon my honour, I've forgotten. [*The door-gong sounds.*] This must be the ladies.

[MURIEL EDEN *enters, followed by* MISS CLARIDGE. MURIEL *is a tall, fresh-looking, girlish young woman, prettily dressed.* SOPHY *rises and meets her.*]

MURIEL.

[*Behind the circular table—to* SOPHY, *breathlessly, as if from the exertion of running upstairs.*] Well, Sophy! [*Looking round.*] Is Lord Quex——? [SOPHY *glances toward* QUEX, *who advances.*] Oh, yes. [*To* QUEX.] Lady Owbridge and Mrs. Jack won't fag upstairs just now. They're waiting for you in the carriage, they asked me to say.

QUEX.

[*In tender solicitation.*] Moses in the Bulrushes? You still elect to have your nails cut?

MURIEL.

Thanks, I [*with an effort*]—I've already seen the picture.

QUEX.

And its merits are not sufficient——?

MURIEL.

[*Guiltily.*] I thought the bulrushes rather well done.

QUEX.

May I present my old friend, Sir Chichester Frayne?

MURIEL.

[*To* FRAYNE.] How do you do?

QUEX.

[*To* FRAYNE.] Will you come, Chick? [*To* MURIEL.] We shall be back very soon.

[MURIEL *nods to* QUEX *and* FRAYNE *and turns away to the window, removing her gloves.* SOPHY *joins her.*]

FRAYNE.

[*To* QUEX.] As I suspected—the typical, creamy English girl. We all do it! we all come to that, sooner or later.

QUEX.

[*Looking from* MURIEL *to* FRAYNE, *proudly.*] Well ——?

FRAYNE.

[*In answer, kissing his finger-tips to the air.*] Alluring!

QUEX.

Ha! [*Hastily.*] We're keeping the ladies waiting.

[*He goes out.* FRAYNE *is following* QUEX, *when he encounters* MISS CLARIDGE. *He pauses, gazing at her admiringly. The door-gong sounds.*]

MISS CLARIDGE.

[*Surprised.*] Do you wish anything, sir?

FRAYNE.

[*With a little sigh of longing.*] Ah—h!

MISS CLARIDGE.

[*Coldly.*] Shall I cut your nails?

FRAYNE.

[*Wofully.*] That's it, dear young lady—you can't!

MISS CLARIDGE.

[*With hauteur.*] Reely! Why not, sir?

FRAYNE.

I regret to say I bite 'em.

[*He goes out.* MISS CLARIDGE *titters loudly to* MISS LIMBIRD.]

SOPHY.

[*To* MISS CLARIDGE, *reprovingly.*] Miss Claridge! I don't require you at present.

[MISS CLARIDGE *withdraws.*]

SOPHY.

[*Going to* MISS LIMBIRD.] Miss Limbird, will *you* oblige me? hot water, please.

[MISS LIMBIRD *goes out. At once* SOPHY *gives a signal to* BASTLING *and* MURIEL, *and keeps guard.* BASTLING *and* MURIEL *talk in low, hurried tones.*]

BASTLING.

[*On the right of the circular table.*] How are you?

MURIEL.

[*On the other side, giving him her hand across the table.*] I don't know. [*Withdrawing her hand.*] I hate myself!

BASTLING.

Hate yourself?

MURIEL.

For this sort of thing. [*Glancing round apprehensively.*] Oh!

BASTLING.

Don't be frightened. Sophy's there.

MURIEL.

I'm nervous—shaky. When I wrote to you last night I thought I should be able to sneak up to town this morning only with a maid. And you've met Quex too!

BASTLING.

None of them suspect——?

MURIEL

No. Oh, but go now!

BASTLING.

Already! may I not sit and watch you?

MURIEL.

Not to-day.

BASTLING.

You must hear my news, then, from Sophy; she'll tell you——

MURIEL.

News?

SOPHY.

[*Turning to them sharply.*] Hsst!

MURIEL.

Good-by!

BASTLING.

[*Grasping her arm.*] Haven't you one loving little speech for me?

SOPHY.

[*Behind the table.*] Gar—r—rh!

[*He releases* MURIEL *and picks up a large wooden bowl of bath-soap, just as* MISS LIMBIRD *re-enters with the hot water.* MURIEL *moves away, hastily.*]

SOPHY.

[*To* BASTLING, *taking the soap from him—raising her voice.*] Thank you—much obliged. [*Transferring the soap to* MISS LIMBIRD *and relieving her of the bowl of water.*] For Captain Bastling, with a bottle of Fleur de Lilas.

[MISS LIMBIRD *returns to her desk;* SOPHY *deposits the bowl of water upon the arm of the screen-chair;* BASTLING *fetches his hat, and gives some directions to* MISS LIMBIRD.]

MURIEL.

[*To* SOPHY, *in a whisper.*] Sophy, these extravagances on his part! I am the cause of them! he is not in the least well off!

SOPHY.

Don't worry; it's all booked. Ha, ha! bless him, he'll never get his account from me! [BASTLING, *with a parting glance in the direction of* MURIEL *and* SOPHY, *goes out.*] He's gone.

[MISS LIMBIRD *also goes out, carrying the bowl of bath-soap.*]

MURIEL.

[*With a sigh of relief.*] Oh!

SOPHY.

[*Coming to her.*] We're by ourselves for a minute. Give me a good hug. [*Embracing her.*] My dear! my darling! ha, ha, ha! you shall be the first to hear of it—I'm engaged.

MURIEL.

Sophy! to whom?

SOPHY.

To Mr. Valma, the great palmist.

MURIEL.

What, the young man you've talked to me about—next door? [*Kissing her.*] I hope you are doing well for yourself, dear.

SOPHY.

He's simply perfect! he's—! oh, how can I be such a brute, talking of my own happiness——! [*In an altered tone.*] Darling, Captain Bastling's regiment is going to be sent off to Hong-Kong.

MURIEL.

[*After a pause—commanding herself.*] When?

SOPHY.

In about a fortnight.

MURIEL.

[*Frigidly.*] Is this what you had to tell me, from him?

SOPHY.

Yes, and that he must see you to-morrow, alone. I'll arrange it. Can you manage to be here at twelve?

MURIEL.

I daresay, somehow.

SOPHY.

[*Looking at her in surprise.*] I thought you'd be more upset.

MURIEL.

[*Taking* SOPHY'S *hand.*] The truth is, Sophy—I'm glad.

SOPHY.

Glad!

MURIEL.

Awfully glad the chance has come of putting an end to all this. Oh, I've been treating him shockingly!

SOPHY.

Him?

MURIEL.

Lord Quex.

SOPHY.

[*Impatiently.*] Oh! pooh!

MURIEL.

[*Leaving* SOPHY.] Yes, after to-morrow he sha'n't find me looking a guilty fool whenever he speaks to me—by Jove, he sha'n't! I believe he guessed I haven't seen Moses in the Bulrushes!

SOPHY.

But, dear, how do you know what Captain Bastling means to say to you to-morrow?

MURIEL.

[*Pausing in her walk.*] To say?—good-by.

SOPHY.

Suppose he asks you to put him out of his misery—marry him directly, on the quiet?

MURIEL.

[*A little unsteadily.*] Then I shall tell him finally—my word is given to Lord Quex.

SOPHY.

[*Coming to her again.*] Given!—wrung out of you. And just for that you'll lose the chance of being happy—all your life—with the man you——

[*She turns away, and sits, on the right of the circular table, blowing her nose.*]

MURIEL.

[*At* SOPHY'S *side, desperately.*] But I tell you, Sophy, I love Lord Quex.

SOPHY.

You may *tell* me.

MURIEL.

I do—I mean, I'm getting to. [*Defiantly.*] At any rate, I am proud of him.

SOPHY.

Proud!

MURIEL.

Certainly—proud that he has mended his ways for my sake.

SOPHY.

[*Between tears and anger.*] Mended his ways! with those eyes of his!

MURIEL.

[*Looking down upon* SOPHY, *wonderingly.*] His eyes? why, they are considered his best feature.

SOPHY.

I never saw wickeder eyes. All my girls say the same.

MURIEL.

[*With rising indignation.*] I am sure you have never detected Lord Quex looking at anybody in a way he should not.

SOPHY.

Oh, I admit he has always behaved in a gentlemanly manner toward me and my girls.

MURIEL.

[*Haughtily.*] Toward you and your——! Sophy, pray remember Lord Quex's rank.

SOPHY.

[*In hot scorn.*] His rank! ha! do you think his lordship has ever let *that* interfere——?

[*She checks herself, finding* MURIEL *staring at her.*]

MURIEL.

[*In horror.*] Sophy!

SOPHY.

[*Discomposed—rising.*] Er—if I'm to do anything to your nails——

[*As* SOPHY *is moving toward the manicure-table,* MURIEL *intercepts her.*]

MURIEL.

You are surely not suggesting that Lord Quex has ever descended——?

SOPHY.

[*Hastily.*] No, no, no. [*Brushing past* MURIEL *and seating herself before the screen-chair.*] Come; they'll all be here directly.

MURIEL.

[*Sitting in the screen-chair.*] Sophy, you have heard some story——

SOPHY.

[*Examining* MURIEL'S *hands.*] A little varnishing is all you need to-day.

MURIEL.

You shall tell me!

SOPHY.

[*Proceeding with her work methodically.*] It's nothing much; I'm sorry I——

MURIEL.

[*Imperatively.*] Sophy!

SOPHY.

[*Reluctantly.*] Oh, well—well, when I was at Mrs. Beaupoint's in Grosvenor Street——

MURIEL.

Yes?

SOPHY.

A Lady Pumphrey came to stay there with a goodish-looking maid—Edith Smith her name was——

MURIEL.

Never mind her name!

SOPHY.

And they'd lately met Lord Quex in a country-house in Worcestershire. Well, he had kissed *her*—Smith admitted it.

MURIEL.

Kissed whom—Lady Pumphrey?

SOPHY.

Oh, of course he'd kissed Lady Pumphrey; but he kissed Smith afterward, when he tipped her. She told me what he said.

MURIEL.

What did he say?

SOPHY.

He said, "There's a little something for yourself, my girl."

MURIEL.

[*Starting to her feet and walking away.*] My heavens! a Maid! what next am I to hear—his *blanchisseuse?* [*Sinking into a chair.*] Oh! oh, dear!

SOPHY.

[*Turning in her chair to face* MURIEL.] It's one thing I always meant to keep to myself.

MURIEL.

[*Bitterly.*] Still, I have promised to forgive him for so much already! And, after all, this occurred a long while ago.

SOPHY.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Ye—e—es. I suppose if you *did* find him up to anything of that sort now, you'd—what would you do?

MURIEL.

Do! [*With all her heart.*] Marry Napier Bastling.

SOPHY.

[*Rising—a mischievous light in her eyes.*] Ah—! I almost wish it *would* happen!

MURIEL.

Sophy!

SOPHY.

[*Leaning against the edge of the circular table, gripping* MURIEL'S *hand.*] Just for your sake, darling. [*In a low voice.*] I almost wish *I* could come across him in some quiet little shady spot——

MURIEL.

[*Looking up at* SOPHY, *horrified.*] What!

SOPHY.

In one of those greeny nooks you've told me of, at Fauncey Court. [*Between her teeth.*] If he ever tried to kiss *me,* and I told you of it, you'd take my word for it, wouldn't you?

MURIEL.

[*Starting to her feet.*] For shame! how dare you let such an idea enter your head? you, a respectable girl, just engaged yourself——!

SOPHY.

[*With a quick look toward the window.*] Oh, yes! hush! [*Clapping her hand to her mouth.*] Oh, what would Valma say if he knew I'd talked in this style!

[*The door-gong sounds.*]

MURIEL.

Here they are.

SOPHY.

[*As they hastily return to their chairs.*] Darling, I was only thinking of you and the poor Captain. [*With another glance toward the window.*] Phew! if my Valma knew!

[*They resume their seats, and the manicuring is continued.*]

[MISS LIMBIRD *enters, preceding* LORD QUEX *and the* COUNTESS OF OWBRIDGE, MRS. JACK EDEN, *and* FRAYNE. MISS MOON *follows.* LADY OWBRIDGE *is a very old lady in a mouse-coloured wig, with a pale, anxious face, watery eyes, and no eyebrows.* MRS. EDEN *is an ultra-fashionably-dressed woman of about thirty, shrill and maniéré.*]

QUEX.

[*To* LADY OWBRIDGE, *who is upon his arm.*] Yes, a curious phase of modern life. Many people come to these places for rest.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Looking about her shrinkingly.*] For rest, Henry?

QUEX.

Certainly. I know a woman—I *knew* a woman who used to declare that her sole repose during the Season was the half-hour with the manicurist.

MRS. EDEN.

How are you, Sophy?

SOPHY.

How are you to-day, Mrs. Eden?

MRS. EDEN.

Lady Owbridge, this is Miss Fullgarney, whom you've heard about.

[SOPHY *rises, makes a bob, and sits again.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Seated.*] I hope you're quite well, my dear.

SOPHY.

[*Busy over* MURIEL'S *nails.*] Thanks, my lady; I hope you're the same.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Sitting.*] What is your opinion of the picture, Lady Owbridge?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Not hearing.*] Eh?

QUEX.

Moses in the Bulrushes—what d'ye think of it?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Tearfully.*] They treat such subjects nowadays with too little reverence.

FRAYNE.

[*Thoughtlessly.*] Too much Pharaoh's daughter and too little Moses.

QUEX.

[*Frowning him down.*] Phsst!

MRS. EDEN.

Certainly the handmaidens remind one of the young ladies in the ballet at the Empire.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

The Empire?

MRS. EDEN.

[*Checking herself.*] Oh——!

QUEX.

Popular place of entertainment.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Ah? The only place of that kind I have visited for some years is the Imperial Institute.

[MRS. EDEN *rises, laughing to herself, and joins* SOPHY *and* MURIEL. FRAYNE *is now establishing cordial relations between himself and* MISS MOON.]

MRS. EDEN.

[*To* SOPHY.] Well, Sophy, and how's your business getting along?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*To* QUEX, *after ascertaining that* FRAYNE *is not near her.*] Oh, Henry, I have asked Sir Chichester to drive down to us to-night, to dine.

QUEX.

[*Watching* FRAYNE *with apprehension.*] Ah, yes, delightful. [*Trying to gain* FRAYNE'S *attention—warningly.*] Phsst! phsst!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Plucking at* QUEX's *coat.*] I feel that Sir Chichester is a very wholesome friend for you, Henry.

QUEX.

Very. Phsst!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

What is the name of the West African place?—Uumbos—Uumbos seems to have improved him vastly.

QUEX.

[*In a low voice.*] Chichester!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

And it is our wish that you should associate for the future only with grey-haired men.

[MISS MOON *now withdraws, with* FRAYNE *at her heels.*]

MURIEL.

[*Rising and coming to* LADY OWBRIDGE.] I'm ready, dear Lady Owbridge. Look! you can see your face in them.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *rises;* MURIEL *displays her nails.* LADY OWBRIDGE *shakes her head gravely, while* QUEX *bends over* MURIEL'S *hands gallantly.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*To* SOPHY.] My hands need trimming-up desperately badly. That maid of mine is a fool at fingers.

SOPHY.

Can't you stay now?

MRS. EDEN.

[*With an impatient movement of the head toward* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Oh, lord, no. [*Suddenly.*] I say, I wish

you'd run down to Richmond, to Fauncey Court, and do me. Could you?

SOPHY.

[*Innocently.*] Oh, yes.

MRS. EDEN.

To-night, before dinner?

SOPHY.

I think I can.

MRS. EDEN.

[*To* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Lady Owbridge, Miss Fullgarney is coming down to Richmond this evening to manicure me. Do, do, do let her give your nails the fashionable cut. [*Going to* QUEX *and* MURIEL.] Everybody is wearing pointed nails this Season.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Advancing to* SOPHY.] Ah, no, no. These practices are somewhat shocking to an old woman. [*To* SOPHY.] But I don't blame you. [*Laying her hand upon* SOPHY'S *arm, kindly.*] So you're Miss Eden's foster-sister, eh?

SOPHY.

I've that honour, my lady.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

You look a little thin. Come down to Fauncey Court to-day as soon as your duties will release you. Spend as many hours there as you can.

SOPHY.

Oh, my lady!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Run about the grounds—go wherever you please; and get the air into your lungs. [*With gracious formality.*] Remember, I invite you.

MURIEL.

[*Innocently.*] How good of you, Lady Owbridge!

SOPHY.

Thank you, my lady.

[FRAYNE *returns—accompanied by* MISS MOON, *who carries a neat package—and settles an account with* MISS LIMBIRD *at the desk.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*To* SOPHY.] You shall be well looked after.

[*She shakes hands with* FRAYNE.]

MURIEL.

[*Kissing* SOPHY.] We shall meet by-and-by.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Muriel—young people——

[MURIEL *joins* LADY OWBRIDGE; *they go out together.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Nodding to* SOPHY.] This evening, Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*In a flutter of simple pleasure.*] Yes, Mrs. Eden.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Shaking hands with* FRAYNE.] Till dinner——

[*She goes out.*]

QUEX.

[*To* SOPHY.] Good-by, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*Tripping across the room.*] Good-day, my lord.

QUEX.

[*Joining* FRAYNE.] Are you coming, Chick?

FRAYNE.

[*Taking the parcel from* MISS MOON—*and turning to* QUEX, *rather bitterly.*] I say, that gal has made me buy something I don't want. They stick you here frightfully——

QUEX.

Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*They go out together.*]

SOPHY.

[*Adjusting her hair at the mirror.*] Come, girls! look alive! no more work for me to-day! I'm off home to change my frock. I've got an invite down to Richmond. My hat and coat!

[*The door-gong sounds.* MISS MOON *disappears at the door in the partition.* MISS HUDDLE *enters.*]

SOPHY.

Miss Hud-delle, please run next door, and ask Mr. Valma to step this way for a moment.

MISS HUDDLE.

He's on the leads, Miss Fullgarney, smoking a cigarette.

SOPHY.

[*Running across to the window.*] Get my bag of tools ready! sharp! [MISS HUDDLE *and* MISS LIMBIRD *go out;* SOPHY *opens the window and calls.*] Valma! Valma! Valma!

[MISS MOON *returns with* SOPHY'S *hat, coat, gloves, and umbrella.*]

MISS MOON.

Your things, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*Taking them from her.*] Send for a hansom—a smart one.

[MISS MOON *runs out as* VALMA *enters at the window.*]

SOPHY.

[*Breathlessly.*] Valma—Valma love! I've got an invite down to Richmond—Lady Owbridge—she's asked me specially! I'm going home to my place to smarten-up. Isn't it jolly? [*In an outburst.*] Oh, love, you might give up for to-day, and take me down!

VALMA.

May I?

SOPHY.

May you! Your hat—get your hat! you'll find me outside in a cab. [*He hurries away.*]

[MISS LIMBIRD, *carrying a leather bag, enters, followed by* MISS CLARIDGE *and* MISS HUDDLE.]

SOPHY.

[*As she, with the aid of her girls, pins on her hat and scrambles into her coat.*] You know, girls, many a silly person's head would be turned at being asked to a place like Fauncey Court—as a guest, bear in mind. But there, the houses I've been in!—it's nothing to me. Still, specially invited by the Countess of Owbridge herself—! [*Putting her feet in turn upon a chair and hitching up her stockings.*] I shall just make rather a favour of manicuring Mrs. Jack. One doesn't go visiting to cut Mrs. Jack's claws. Gloves! Thank goodness, the evenings are long! they say it's simply heavenly at Fauncey Court—

simply heaven—— [*She breaks off abruptly, staring straight before her. Under her breath.*] Oh—! Fauncey Court—Lord Quex——!

MISS CLARIDGE.

What's the matter, Miss Fullgarney?

SOPHY.

N—n—nothing.

MISS MOON.

[*Entering.*] Cab, Miss Fullgarney!

SOPHY.

[*In an altered voice.*] Bag. [*She takes her bag from* MISS LIMBIRD *and walks away, rather slowly, with her head down. Quietly, without turning.*] See you in the morning, girls.

THE FOUR GIRLS.

Good-afternoon, Miss Fullgarney.

[SOPHY *goes out.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

The scene represents a portion of an English garden laid out in Italian fashion. At the extreme back—upon ground slightly raised—two dense cypress hedges, about sixteen feet high, form an alley running from right to left. In the centre of the hedge which is nearer the spectator there is an opening, and at this opening are three or four steps connecting the higher with the lower level. Beyond the alley nothing is seen but the sky and some tree-tops. In advance is an enclosure formed by a dwarf cypress-hedge, about four feet in height, also broken in the centre by an opening, and running off right and left at a sharp angle. On the outside of the dwarf hedge is a walk; and beyond, on the right and left, are trees. Within the enclosure, on the left, is a small fountain; facing the fountain, on the right, a piece of old, broken sculpture. Other bits of antique sculpture are placed in different parts of the garden. In the foreground, on the right toward the centre, stands a stone bench, on the left of which is a table upon which are the remains of "afternoon tea," with a garden-chair. A similar stone bench stands opposite.

The light is that of a very fine evening.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *is in the garden-chair asleep, an open book in her lap.* QUEX *and* MURIEL *stand, talking together, by the fountain. On the right-hand stone bench the* DUCHESS OF STROOD *and* MRS. EDEN *are seated. The* DUCHESS *is a daintily beautiful doll of about seven-and-thirty—a poseuse, outwardly dignified and stately when upon her guard, really a frail, shallow little creature full of*

extravagant sentimentality. Until LADY OWBRIDGE *wakes, the conversation is carried on in subdued tones.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Indicating* MURIEL *and* QUEX.] They make a fascinating couple, don't they, Duchess?

DUCHESS.

[*With placid melancholy.*] To see two people on the threshold of wedlock is always painfully interesting.

MRS. EDEN.

I am quite triumphant about it. It is such a delightful engagement, now that the horrid difficulties are smoothed away.

DUCHESS.

Yes, you were telling me of some sad obstacles——

MRS. EDEN.

I nearly perished of them! [*Very confidentially.*] There's no doubt, you know, that his past *has* been exceptionally naughty.

DUCHESS.

Really? Ah! don't be surprised that I am not more deeply shocked. In these surroundings it is hard to realise that every aspect of life is not as lovely as [*pointing to the foliage*]—the tones of those exquisite, deep greens, for example.

MRS. EDEN.

However, the dear thing is going to be *so* good in the future. [*Turning to the* DUCHESS.] I keep forgetting —Lord Quex is a very old friend of yours?

DUCHESS.

[*Serenely.*] An acquaintance of many years' standing. But since his Grace has been an invalid we have lived

much abroad, or in seclusion, and gossip has not reached us. Alas, you find me a ready subject *à désillusionner!* [*Rising.*] We are in the sun. Shall we walk?

MRS. EDEN.

[*Sympathetically, as they walk.*] Is his Grace still very unwell?

DUCHESS.

[*Smiling sadly upon* MRS. EDEN.] He is still over seventy.

[*They wander away, through the trees, as* QUEX *and* MURIEL *leave the fountain.*]

QUEX.

[*With tender playfulness, first glancing at the sleeping* LADY OWBRIDGE.] And so all these good things are to befall me after to-morrow?

MURIEL.

[*In a low voice.*] After to-morrow.

QUEX.

When I approach, I shall no longer see you skim away into the far vista of these alleys, or shrink back into the shadows of the corridors [*prosaically*]—after to-morrow.

MURIEL.

No—not after to-morrow.

QUEX.

In place of a cold word, a chilling phrase, a warm one—after to-morrow.

MURIEL.

I am going to try.

QUEX.

If I touch your hand, you'll not slip it behind your back in a hurry [*touching her hand*]—?

MURIEL.

[*Withdrawing it.*] Not after to-morrow.

[*She sits; he stands behind the stone bench, leaning over the back of it.*]

QUEX.

But why, may I ask, is this bliss reserved till after *to-morrow?*

MURIEL.

I had rather you did *not* ask me, Quex.

QUEX.

No? I see, I am a day too soon in putting even that little question.

MURIEL.

Ah, I'll tell you this—I am going to turn over a new leaf, after to-morrow.

QUEX.

You! your pages are all milk-white. What can you detect upon one of them to induce you to turn it?

MURIEL.

[*Gazing into space.*] I—I've been scribbling there—scrawling—drawing pictures——

QUEX.

Pictures—of what?

MURIEL.

You shall know, perhaps, some day.

QUEX.

After to-morrow?

MURIEL.

Yes, Quex, but—after many to-morrows.

[*Two men-servants—an old man and a young one—descend the steps and proceed to remove the tea-things.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Waking.*] Eh—? [*Seeing* MURIEL *and* QUEX.] Ah, my dears—! I am reading such an absorbing book.

MURIEL.

[*By her side, taking the book.*] May I—?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

You should study the Dean of St. Olpherts' sermons—and you, Henry.

QUEX.

[*Taking the book from* MURIEL *and turning its pages.*] Yes, I must—I must——

LADY OWBRIDGE.

By the way, has anything been seen of that nice young manicure girl, Miss Sophy—something—?

MURIEL.

Sophy Fullgarney—she arrived at about half-past four, and I asked Mrs. Gregory to show her over the house. I thought you would not object.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Object! it pleases me.

MURIEL.

She is roving about the grounds now.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

An exceedingly prepossessing young woman, of her class.

[*The servants have gone up the steps, carrying the tea-things.*]

THE ELDER SERVANT.

[*Looking down the alley toward the left.*] I see the young person, my lady.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

I'll speak to her, Bristow.

[*The elder servant goes off toward the left; the younger one, bearing the tray, to the right. The* DUCHESS *and* MRS. EDEN *return, above the low cypress hedge;* QUEX *meets them.*]

MURIEL.

I would not have left her, but the young man she is engaged to brought her down, and I took it upon myself to give him permission to remain.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Oh, is Miss Fullgarney engaged?

MURIEL.

To Mr. Valma, the palmist.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Approaching.*] Valma, the palmist!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

What is a palmist, pray?

MURIEL.

He reads your past and your future in the lines of your hands. It's his profession, dear Lady Owbridge.

MRS. EDEN.

Oh, do let us have him into the drawing-room after dinner! I hear he is simply charming.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Charming! [*Rising.*] What are our ladies coming to! Dear, dear me! in my day such follies and superstitions were entirely restricted to the kitchen.

[MURIEL *joins the* DUCHESS. QUEX *is dutifully looking into the book of sermons. The servant returns, followed by* SOPHY, *and then retires;* SOPHY *comes forward, beamingly. She is prettily dressed, but in sober colours.*]

SOPHY.

[*To* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Here I am, my lady. I'm having such a good time!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

That's right.

SOPHY.

Oh, this garden! they may well call it heavenly.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

They ought not to call it that, my dear. But it is indeed full of earthly solace.

SOPHY.

It must be. And what a place for a bicycle!

MURIEL.

[*Reprovingly.*] Bicycles are not allowed to enter these grounds, Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*Sobered.*] Oh——!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Miss Eden tells me you are accompanied by the young man to whom you are engaged to be married.

SOPHY.

I hope I haven't taken too great a liberty——

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Looking round.*] I don't see him.

SOPHY.

He has run back to the station. I've just found out I left my bag in the fly that brought us here. So stupid of me!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Mrs. Gregory will give you, both, dinner.

SOPHY.

Thank you, my lady.

[*The* DUCHESS *is now seated in the garden-chair. The younger of the two servants enters, carrying* SOPHY'S *bag and the evening papers.*]

SERVANT.

[*Handing the bag to* SOPHY.] The cabman has brought your bag back, Miss.

SOPHY.

There now! Much obliged. [*To* MRS. EDEN.] Poor Mr. Valma will have his tramp for nothing, won't he?

[SOPHY *and* MRS. EDEN *talk together.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

The evening papers, Morgan?

SERVANT.

[*Who has laid the papers upon the table.*] Yes, my lady.
[*The servant retires.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

So late? we must go in and dress.

DUCHESS.

[*Who has been occupied in observing* QUEX.] I'll follow you, dear Lady Owbridge.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *moves away and is joined by* MRS. EDEN.]

MRS. EDEN.

[*As she ascends the steps with* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Sophy, I shall be ready for you in a quarter of an hour.

SOPHY.

All right, Mrs. Eden.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *and* MRS. EDEN *disappear.*]

MURIEL.

[*Crossing to* SOPHY.] Wouldn't you like to walk to the gates to meet Mr. Valma?

SOPHY.

Thanks, dear, I think I would.

MURIEL.

I can show you a nearer way than by going back to the house. [*Pointing into the distance.*] Follow this hedge and take the second alley—not the first—on your left. When you reach the big fountain——

[QUEX, *still dipping into the sermons, has come down to the back of the table. He now throws the book upon the table and picks up a newspaper.*]

QUEX.

I beg your pardon, Duchess—I didn't see you.

DUCHESS.

[*In a whisper.*] Harry——

QUEX.

[*Startled.*] Eh?

DUCHESS.

I will hurry into my gown and return. Be here in a quarter of an hour.

QUEX.

May I ask—the reason?

DUCHESS.

[*A newspaper in her hand—talking to him, in undertones, over the top of it.*] For a week, only the merest commonplaces have passed between us. I must relieve my heart; it is bursting!

QUEX.

I entreat you to consider my position.

DUCHESS.

Yours! have *I* no reputation to endanger? [*Rising—laying the paper aside.*] What a pitiably small request! you will grant it?

QUEX.

If you could see your way to excuse me——

DUCHESS.

In memory of the past—! I demand it!

QUEX.

[*With a stiff bow.*] Oh—oh, certainly.

DUCHESS.

[*Leaving him.*] Thank you.

QUEX.

[*To himself.*] Damn!

[*He turns on his heel and walks away.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Joining* MURIEL.] You are coming to dress?

MURIEL.

[*After smiling assent, presenting* SOPHY.] Miss Fullgarney was my first playmate, Duchess.

DUCHESS.

[*Looking upon* SOPHY *graciously.*] Ah? [*To* MURIEL.] The souvenirs of childhood are sweet, are they not?

[*She slips her arm through* MURIEL'S, *and they ascend the steps and go away together.* SOPHY *comes to the stone bench on the left, upon which she deposits her bag. She opens the bag, produces a little mirror and a comb, and puts her "fringe" in order—humming as she does so an air from the latest comic opera. Then she returns the comb and mirror to the bag, and—bag in hand—prepares to depart. While this is going on* QUEX *returns, above the low hedge. He ascends the steps and looks off into the distance, watching the retreating figure of the* DUCHESS. *After a moment or two he shrugs his shoulders in a perplexed, troubled way, and, coming down the steps, encounters* SOPHY.]

SOPHY.

[*Innocently.*] Lovely evening, my lord.

QUEX.

[*Passing her, with a nod and a smile.*] Very—very.

[*At the table, he exchanges the newspaper he carries for another. She is going in the direction indicated by* MURIEL. *Suddenly she pauses, above the dwarf cypress hedge, and stands looking at* QUEX *with an expression in which fear and determination are mingled. Having selected his newspaper,* QUEX *crosses to the left and sits, reading.*]

SOPHY.

[*Coming to him.*] I don't think I shall go, after all.

QUEX.

[*Lowering his paper.*] Eh?

SOPHY.

I was just starting off down to the gates, you know, to meet Mr. Valma.

QUEX.

[*With amiable indifference.*] Oh?

SOPHY.

[*Her head upon one side, smiling.*] But it's too hot for walking, isn't it?

QUEX.

[*Resuming his reading.*] It is warm.

SOPHY.

[*Putting her bag upon the table and removing her gloves.*] Phew!

[*She eyes him askance, undecided as to a plan of action. He lowers his paper again, disconcerting her.*]

QUEX.

You don't feel you *ought* to go and meet your—Mr. Valma?

SOPHY.

[*Edging toward him.*] I might miss him—mightn't I?

QUEX.

Certainly—you might.

SOPHY.

Besides, it wouldn't do for me to attend upon Mrs. Jack—Mrs. Eden—all puffing and towzelled; [*archly*] now, would it?

QUEX.

[*Resuming his reading.*] You're the best judge.

SOPHY.

So I've a quarter of an hour to fill in somehow. [*A pause.*] I've a quarter of an hour to fill in somehow.

QUEX.

[*Behind his paper, beginning to be extremely bored.*] Indeed?

SOPHY.

[*Quaking.*] I—I wish there were some quiet little snady places to ramble about in, here at Fauncey Court.

QUEX.

There are several.

SOPHY.

Are there? . . . are there?

QUEX.

[*Turning his paper.*] Oh, yes, a great many.

SOPHY.

You see, I'm a stranger——

QUEX.

[*Kindly.*] Well, you run along; you'll find 'em. [*She walks away slowly, baffled. He glances at her over his paper, slightly puzzled.*] Have you seen the grotto?

SOPHY.

[*Turning sharply.*] No.

QUEX.

[*Pointing toward the right.*] It's in that direction.

SOPHY.

Grotto? Dark, I suppose, and lonelyish?

QUEX.

You said you desired shade and quiet.

SOPHY.

Yes, but not darkness. Fancy me in a grotto all by myself . . . by myself . . . !

QUEX.

[*Behind his paper again.*] I'm afraid I have no further suggestion to offer.

[*There is another pause; then her face lights up, and she comes down to him swiftly.*]

SOPHY.

[*Close to him.*] Show me your nails, my lord.

QUEX.

[*Lowering his paper.*] My nails?

SOPHY.

[*Taking his hand and examining it.*] Excuse me. Oh, my lord, for shame!

QUEX.

You take exception to them?

SOPHY.

This is hacking, not cutting. You ought never to be allowed within a mile of a pair of scissors.

QUEX.

[*Looking at his other hand.*] Oh, come! they're hardly as bad as all that.

SOPHY.

[*Examining that hand also.*] Ha, ha, ha!

QUEX.

[*Rising, somewhat abashed.*] Ha! I confess I am a little unskilful at such operations.

SOPHY.

No gentleman should trust to himself where his nails are concerned. Why, a man's hand has lost him a young lady's affections before this! I've heard of heaps of cases where matches have been broken off——

QUEX.

[*Putting his hands behind him, smiling.*] Really? the results of manicuring are more far-reaching than I had imagined.

SOPHY.

You see, my lord, when a man's courting he is free to look his young lady in the face for as long as he chooses; it's considered proper and attentive. But the girl is expected to drop *her* eyes, and then—what has *she* to look

at? Why, a well-trimmed hand or an ugly one. [*Taking off her rings.*] Now then, I'll do wonders for you in ten minutes.

QUEX.

Thank you; I am not going indoors just yet.

SOPHY.

No need to go indoors. [*Depositing her rings upon the table and opening her bag.*] I've got my bag here, with all my tools—see!

QUEX.

Ah, but I won't trouble you this evening. Another occasion——

SOPHY.

[*Arranging her manicure instruments, etc., upon the table.*] No trouble at all, my lord—quite an honour. [*Indicating the stone bench.*] Please sit down there. [*Producing a little brass bowl.*] Water——?

[*She runs to the fountain and fills her bowl from its basin.*]

QUEX.

[*Crossing, hesitatingly, to the right—looking at his nails and speaking in a formal manner.*] You have been bidden to Fauncey Court for rest and relaxation, Miss Fullgarney; it is most obliging of you to allow your pleasure to be disturbed in this way.

SOPHY.

[*Returning to him.*] Oh, don't say that, my lord. [*Putting the bowl upon the table and dragging the garden-chair forward to face him.*] Business *is* a pleasure, sometimes.

[*Her close proximity to him forces him back upon the bench.*]

QUEX.

[*Seated—stiffly.*] You must, at least, let me open an account at your excellent establishment.

SOPHY.

Not I. [*Seated—taking his right hand.*] One may work occasionally for love, I should hope? [*archly*] ha, ha! just for love, eh?

QUEX.

[*Uncomfortably.*] No, no, I couldn't permit it—I couldn't permit it.

SOPHY.

[*Holding his hand almost caressingly.*] Well, well! we'll see—we'll see. [*She clips his nails briskly and methodically. While she does so she again hums a song, looking up at him at intervals enticingly, under her lashes. Breaking off in her song.*] My goodness! what a smooth, young hand you have!

QUEX.

[*His discomfort increasing.*] Er—indeed?

SOPHY.

Many a man of six-and-twenty would be glad to own such hands, I can tell you. [*Patting his hand reprovingly.*] Keep still! [*It is now his turn to hum a song, which he does, under his breath, to disguise his embarrassment. She looks up at him.*] But, then, you're an awfully young man for your age, in every way, aren't you?

QUEX.

[*Gazing at the sky.*] Oh, I don't know about that.

SOPHY.

[*Slyly.*] You *do* know. [*Wagging her head at him.*] You *do* know.

QUEX.

[*Relaxing slightly.*] It may be so, of course, without one's being conscious of it.

SOPHY.

May be so! ah, ha! not conscious of it! ho! [*Slapping his hand again, soundly.*] Artful!

QUEX.

[*Flattered and amused.*] No, no, I assure you! ha, ha!

[*They laugh together. His constraint gradually diminishes. After shaking some liquid soap from a bottle into the bowl, she places the bowl beside him on the bench.*]

SOPHY.

[*While doing this.*] My young ladies at a-hundred-and-eighty-five all agree with me about you.

QUEX.

Do they?

SOPHY.

Yes, do they!

QUEX.

Your young ladies?

SOPHY.

My girls.

QUEX.

Ha, ha, ha! And what terrible pronouncement has a-hundred-and-eighty-five to pass upon me?

SOPHY.

Seven-and-thirty, *you* look—not a day older; that's what *we* say. There, dip your fingers in that, do!

QUEX.

Into this?

SOPHY.

[*Thrusting his fingers into the bowl.*] Baby! [*The water splashes over her dress and his coat.*] Oh!

QUEX.

I beg your pardon.

SOPHY.

Now what have you done? [*Wiping the water from his coat.*] You clumsy boy!

QUEX.

Thanks, thanks.

[*She commences operations upon his left hand. He is now thoroughly entertained by her freedom and audacity.*]

SOPHY.

Ha, ha! do you know what *I* maintain?

QUEX.

[*Laughing.*] Upon my word, I dread to think.

SOPHY.

Why, that every man who looks younger than his years should be watched by the police.

QUEX.

Good heavens, Sophy—Miss Fullgarney!

SOPHY.

Yes—as a dangerous person

QUEX.

Dangerous! ho, come!

SOPHY.

[*With the suggestion of a wink.*] Dangerous. The man who is younger than he ought to be is always no better than he should be.

QUEX.

Ha, ha, ha!

SOPHY.

Am I right? am I right, eh? [*Putting her cheek near his lips—speaking in a low voice, breathlessly, her eyes averted.*] Tell me whether I'm right, my lord.

[*For the first time, a suspicion of her designs crosses his mind. He draws back slowly, eyeing her. There is a pause.*]

QUEX.

[*In an altered tone, but keeping her in play.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha! [*Looking at his watch.*] I—I am afraid I shall have to run away to dress for dinner very soon.

SOPHY.

[*Resuming her work, disappointed.*] Not yet; you've plenty of time. But there, dangerous or not dangerous, in my heart I can't help holding with what my lady-customers are continually saying.

QUEX.

[*Watching her keenly.*] No? and what are your lady-customers continually saying?

SOPHY.

Why, that the young fellows of the day are such conceited, apish creatures; no man under forty-five is worth wasting a minute's time over.

QUEX.

Ho! they say that, your lady-customers?

SOPHY.

Yes; and they're good judges, they are.

QUEX.

Good judges! none better—none better.

SOPHY.

[*Laying her clipper aside suddenly, and putting her hand to her eyes with a cry of pain.*] Oh!

QUEX.

[*Coolly.*] What's the matter?

SOPHY.

[*Rising.*] A little splinter has flown into my eye. It often happens.

QUEX.

[*Rising.*] Extremely painful, I expect?

SOPHY.

[*Producing her handkerchief.*] Very. [*Giving him her handkerchief.*] Do you think you could find it?

QUEX.

Certainly, if it's to be found.

SOPHY.

[*Holding the lapels of his coat, her head almost upon his shoulder, her eyes closed.*] Ah! please make haste and look for it!

QUEX.

Right or left?

SOPHY.

The ri—the left.

QUEX.

[*Sharply.*] Raise your head. Stand up.

SOPHY.

[*Releasing his coat and raising her head.*] Eh?

QUEX.

[*Sternly.*] Open your eyes. Both of them. [*She opens her eyes and stares at him. He returns her handkerchief.*] There! I have removed the splinter. [*She slowly backs away like a whipped child. He follows her.*] Miss Fullgarney, I understand you are engaged to be married—to this young man, Valma?

SOPHY.

[*Tremblingly.*] Yes, my lord.

QUEX.

Do you care for him?

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] Yes.

QUEX.

In love with him?

SOPHY.

Oh, yes, my lord, indeed.

QUEX.

And yet you still flirt?

SOPHY.

Y—es.

QUEX.

Take my advice—be satisfied with the kisses your sweetheart gives you. Don't try to get them from other men, old or young.

SOPHY.

No—no——

QUEX.

[*Sternly, but kindly.*] You little fool!

[POLLITT *enters, wearing a tall hat and lemon-coloured gloves.*]

POLLITT.

[*Jealously.*] Sophy! [QUEX *walks away.*]

SOPHY.

[*Falteringly.*] The fly-man brought back the bag, Valma dear.

POLLITT.

I am aware of that. [*Lowering his voice.*] What are you doing here with Lord Quex?

SOPHY.

I—I've been manicuring him.

[*The* YOUNGER SERVANT *comes down the steps.*]

SERVANT.

[*To* SOPHY.] Mrs. Eden is quite ready for you, Miss.

[*She hurriedly replaces her manicure instruments, etc., in the bag, hands the bowl to the* SERVANT, *and without looking at* POLLITT *or* QUEX, *goes swiftly up the steps and disappears. The* SERVANT *follows her, carrying the bowl.*]

POLLITT.

[*To* QUEX.] Excuse me, my lord——

QUEX.

[*Coming forward, and picking up his newspaper.*] Eh?

POLLITT.

That young lady and I are engaged to be married.

QUEX.

Mr.—Valma?

POLLITT.

Yes, my lord. [*Hotly.*] And I very much object to her manicuring gentlemen.

QUEX.

[*Dryly.*] Well, there you have a little something to discuss at home—before, and, perhaps, after marriage.

POLLITT.

I consider the custom of ladies manicuring gentlemen one that may occasionally lead to undue familiarity, my lord.

QUEX.

I am inclined to agree with you, sir.

POLLITT.

And I shall do all I can to persuade Miss Fullgarney to relinquish active participation in the business.

QUEX.

The palmistry profession is a flourishing one at present, eh, Mr. Valma?

POLLITT.

[*Loftily.*] My engagement-book is always full. I have disappointed several ladies by coming here this afternoon.

QUEX.

Poor women! Nevertheless, pray be careful how you blight the manicure trade. Crazes die, you know—nails grow.

POLLITT.

[*Tapping his breast.*] I think *we* have come to stay, my lord.

QUEX.

[*Lightly.*] Well, you're sailing pretty close to the wind, remember, you fellows.

POLLITT.

My lord!

QUEX.

[*Replacing his newspaper upon the table.*] And if some day you should find yourselves in the police-court, alongside a poor old woman whose hand had been crossed with a threepenny-bit down an area——

[*The* DUCHESS *appears on the further side of the low cypress hedge. She is dressed for dinner. The sky is now faintly rosy, and during the ensuing scene it deepens into a rich sunset.*]

QUEX.

We are going to have a flaming sunset, Duchess.

DUCHESS.

Superb.

POLLITT.

[*Haughtily.*] I wish you good-evening, my lord.

QUEX.

Oh, good-evening, Mr. Valma. [*To himself.*] Impudent beggar!

[POLLITT *walks away. After watching his going, the* DUCHESS *comes eagerly forward.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Her hand upon her heart.*] Oh! I am here, Harry!

QUEX.

[*In delicate protest.*] Ah, my dear Duchess!

DUCHESS.

Fortunately I have been able to dress quickly without exciting curiosity. My maid was summoned away this afternoon, to her father who is sick. [*Sinking on to the bench.*] Still, these risks are considerable enough.

QUEX.

And yet you deliberately court them!

DUCHESS.

Great passions involve great dangers. The history of the world shows that.

QUEX.

But why now—now that circumstances are altered between us? why, on earth, do you play these hazardous tricks now?

DUCHESS.

I was determined to meet, to know, the girl with whom you are about to *ranger* yourself, Harry.

QUEX.

Even that could have been arrived at in some safer way.

DUCHESS.

Ah, but you fail to see; it was the daring of this proceeding that attracted me—the romance of it!

QUEX.

[*Raising his hands.*] Romance! still!

DUCHESS.

Always. It is the very blood in my veins. It keeps me young. I shall die a romantic girl, however old I may be.

QUEX.

You ought, you really ought to have flourished in the Middle Ages.

DUCHESS.

You have frequently made that observation. [*Rising.*] I do live in the Middle Ages, in my imagination. I live in every age in which Love was not a cool, level emotion, but a fierce, all-conquering flame—a flame that grew in the heart of a woman, that of a sudden spread through her whole organism, that lit up her eyes with a light more refulgent than the light of sun or moon! [*Laying her hand upon his arm.*] Oh, oh, this poor, thin, modern sentiment miscalled Love——!

QUEX.

[*Edging away.*] Sssh! pray be careful!

DUCHESS.

Ah, yes. But, dear Harry, I cannot endure the ordeal any longer.

QUEX.

The ordeal?

DUCHESS.

The prolonged discomfort, to which I have subjected myself, of watching your wooing of Miss Eden. I must go.

QUEX.

[*With ill-concealed relief.*] Go! leave us?

DUCHESS.

I recognize how fitting it is that you should bring your wild, irregular career to a close; but after to-morrow I shall cease to be a spectator of these preliminaries.

QUEX.

[*His eyes sparkling.*] After to-morrow!

DUCHESS.

Yes, I rejoin poor dear Strood on Friday. True, he has four nurses—he always had four nurses, if you remember?

QUEX.

[*Sympathetically.*] Three or four.

DUCHESS.

But then, nurses are but nurses. [*Nobly.*] I must not forget that I am a wife, Harry.

QUEX.

No, no—you mustn't forget that.

DUCHESS.

[*Gazing into his eyes.*] And so, between you and me [*placing her hands upon his shoulders*] it is over.

QUEX.

[*Promptly.*] Over.

DUCHESS.

Finally, irrevocably over.

QUEX.

[*Freeing himself.*] Absolutely over. [*Taking her hand and bowing over it solemnly.*] Done with.

[*He walks away.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Moving slowly.*] That is—almost over.

QUEX.

[*Turning sharply.*] Almost?

DUCHESS.

We have yet to say good-by, you know.

QUEX.

[*Returning to her, apprehensively.*] We—we have said good-by.

DUCHESS.

Ah, no, no!

QUEX.

[*Again bowing over her hand—with simulated feeling.*] Good-by.

DUCHESS.

[*Looking round.*] What! *here?*

QUEX.

[*Humouring her.*] This romantic old garden! [*pointing to the statuary*] these silent witnesses—beholders, it is likely, of many similar scenes! the—the—setting sun! Could any situation be more appropriate?

DUCHESS.

But we are liable to be interrupted at any moment. The joint romance of our lives, Harry, ought not to end with a curt word and formal hand-shake in an exposed spot of this kind. [*Sitting in the garden-chair.*] Oh, it cannot, must not, end so!

QUEX.

[*Eyeing her uneasily.*] Frankly, I see nothing else for it.

DUCHESS.

I can't credit it. Why, what was the second reason for my coming here?

QUEX.

Second reason?

DUCHESS.

That our parting might be in keeping with our great attachment!

QUEX.

Impossible.

DUCHESS.

Impracticable?

QUEX.

In every way, impossible.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking his hand.*] Oh, don't say that, dear Harry! Ah, the auguries tell me that what I ask will be.

QUEX.

[*Omitting, in his anxiety, to withdraw his hand.*] The auguries?

DUCHESS.

Fate—coincidence—call it what you please—foreshadows one more meeting between us.

QUEX.

Coincidence?

DUCHESS.

[*Intensely, in a low voice.*] Harry, do you remember a particular evening at Stockholm?

QUEX.

[*Hazily.*] Stockholm?

DUCHESS.

That evening upon which we discovered how much our society meant to each other!

QUEX.

[*Vaguely, while he hastily recovers possession of his hand.*] At Stockholm was it——?

DUCHESS.

You were sailing with us in the Baltic—you must recollect? Our yacht had put in at Stockholm; we had come to the Grand Hotel. Strood had retired, and you and I were sitting out upon the balcony watching the lights of the café on the Norrbro and the tiny steamboats that stole to and fro across the harbour. Surely you recollect?

QUEX.

Yes, yes, of course.

DUCHESS.

Well, do you remember the brand of the champagne you sipped while you and I sat smoking?

QUEX.

Good Lord, no!

DUCHESS.

"Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or." You remarked that it was a brand unknown to you. Have you ever met it since, Harry?

QUEX.

Not that I——

DUCHESS.

Nor I till last night, at dinner. [*Impressively.*] It is in this very house.

QUEX.

[*With a slight shrug of the shoulders.*] Extremely probable.

DUCHESS.

And do you remember how I was clad, that evening at Stockholm?

QUEX.

I am afraid I don't.

DUCHESS.

Couleur de rose garnie de vert. I have just such another garment with me.

QUEX.

Really?

DUCHESS.

Do you remember in what month we were at Stockholm?

QUEX.

No.

DUCHESS.

June—this month. Nor the day of the week?

QUEX.

It must be ten years ago!

DUCHESS.

Wednesday. There stands the record in my diary.

QUEX.

Diary! good heavens, you are not so indiscreet——!

DUCHESS.

No, no—only the words, "warm evening." Yes, it was upon a Wednesday. What is to-day?

QUEX.

Wednesday.

DUCHESS.

[*Rising.*] Harry, I want to see you sipping that brand of champagne once more, while you and I sit facing one another, silently, dreamily smoking Argyropulos.

QUEX.

[*Negatively.*] Duchess——

DUCHESS.

To end as we began! you have not the heart to refuse?

QUEX.

I——

DUCHESS.

You do refuse?

QUEX.

I do.

[*She passes him, and again sinks upon the bench.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Her back toward him, her shoulders heaving.*] Oh! oh!

QUEX.

I—I am profoundly sorry to be obliged to speak to you in this fashion.

DUCHESS.

Oh, then I cannot go on Friday!

QUEX.

Not!

DUCHESS.

No! no! no!

QUEX.

Believe me, it would be better for you, for me, for everybody——

DUCHESS.

I cannot! [*Producing a diminutive lace handkerchief.*] In the first shock of the news of your engagement—for it was a shock—one thought consoled me; throughout the time that has elapsed since then I have fed upon this same

thought—there will be a parting in keeping with our great attachment! And now, you would rob me even of that!

QUEX.

But—but—but—a solemn, deliberate leave-taking! the ceremony, of all others, to be carefully avoided!

DUCHESS.

Not by me, Harry—not by me. I wish to carry, in my breast, from this house the numb despair of a piteous climax. I cannot drive away smugly from these gates with the simple feelings of a woman who has been paying a mere visit—I cannot!

QUEX.

My dear Sidonia-——!

DUCHESS.

[*Decidedly.*] I say I cannot!

QUEX.

[*To himself, with a little groan.*] Oh! phew!

[*He walks to and fro impatiently, reflecting,* SOPHY, *without her hat, comes quickly down the steps as if making for the table. Seeing* QUEX *and the* DUCHESS, *she draws back inquisitively.*]

QUEX.

[*By the* DUCHESS's *side again, helplessly.*] Well, I—ha!—I——

DUCHESS.

[*Rising eagerly, laying a hand upon his arm.*] You *will?*

[SOPHY *stoops down behind the dwarf cypress hedge.*]

QUEX.

You are certain—certain that this would effectually remove the obstacle to your rejoining—[*with a wave of the hand*] on Friday?

DUCHESS.

Why, do you think I would risk an anticlimax? [*In an intense whisper.*] To-night! [*Louder.*] To-night? [*He hesitates a little longer—then bows in assent, stiffly and coldly. She gives an ardent sigh.*] Ah——! [*He retreats a step or two. She draws herself up with dignity.*] To-night then——

[*She turns from him and glides away through the trees. He stands for a moment, a frown upon his face, in thought.*]

QUEX.

[*Suddenly, moving in the direction she has taken.*] No, no! Duchess——! [*A gong sounds in the distance. He pauses, looking at his watch, angrily.*] Ptshah! [*He turns up the stage and discovers* SOPHY, *who is now standing behind the hedge.*] Hallo! [SOPHY *advances, laughing rather foolishly.*] What are you doing here?

SOPHY.

Looking for my rings. I took them off before I began manicuring you.

QUEX.

[*Pointing to the hedge.*] You didn't drop them there, did you?

SOPHY.

No, I left them on the table.

QUEX.

[*Looking toward the table.*] *There's* the table.

SOPHY.

[*Coming to the table and putting on her rings.*] Yes, I know.

QUEX.

[*After a short pause.*] How long have you been here?

SOPHY.

I? Oh, I'd just come as you spoke to me.

QUEX.

[*Half-satisfied.*] Oh——?

[*He goes up the steps, gives her a parting look, and disappears. It is now twilight.* MRS. EDEN, FRAYNE, *and* MURIEL—*all dressed for dinner—appear on the side of the low hedge.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*To* FRAYNE, *walking with him above the hedge.*] Delightful, isn't it? It was planted by the late Lord Owbridge's father a hundred years ago.

FRAYNE.

[*Seeing* SOPHY.] Why, isn't that the young manicure lady?

MRS. EDEN.

Yes. All these pieces of sculpture are genuine old Italian. This quaint little fountain came from the Villa Marchotti——

FRAYNE.

[*Edging toward* SOPHY.] Alluring.

MRS. EDEN.

This is the fountain.

FRAYNE.

[*Returning to her.*] Quaint old fountain.

SOPHY.

[*To* MURIEL, *across the hedge in a whisper.*] Darling!

MRS. EDEN.

[*Looking into the distance.*] I think I see the dear Duchess.

FRAYNE.

[*Alertly.*] Where?

MRS. EDEN.

There.

FRAYNE.

I have the honour of knowing her Grace slightly.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Moving away.*] What a sweet woman!

FRAYNE.

[*Following her.*] Alluring!

[*They disappear through the trees as* MURIEL, *coming from below the hedge, joins* SOPHY.]

SOPHY.

Darling!

MURIEL.

What is it, Sophy?

SOPHY.

Lord Quex and this—this Duchess—they know each other very well, of course?

MURIEL.

They are old acquaintances, I understand.

SOPHY.

Ah!

MURIEL.

Why do you ask?

SOPHY.

I've just seen them together, talking.

MURIEL.

Talking? why not?

SOPHY.

Yes, but how?

MURIEL.

How?

SOPHY.

I'll tell you. After you went indoors to dress, I took off my rings and put them on that table. [*Looking away rather guiltily.*] Rings fidget me, this hot weather—don't they you? Well, just as I'd finished with Mrs. Jack, it suddenly struck me—my rings!—and I hurried back to fetch them. When I got here, I came across Lord Quex and the Duchess.

MURIEL.

[*Calmly.*] Yes?

SOPHY.

I stooped down behind that hedge there.

MURIEL.

You did not!

SOPHY.

Oh, I suppose you consider it mean!

MURIEL.

Despicable!

SOPHY.

Despicable, is it! I don't care! My goodness, I'd do the shabbiest thing a woman could do to save you from him!

MURIEL.

[*Peering among the trees.*] Hush, hush, hush!

SOPHY.

[*On the verge of tears.*] Perhaps you fancy I'm mean from choice? Perhaps you imagine——?

MURIEL.

Be quiet, Sophy!

SOPHY.

[*Giving a sniff and lowering her voice.*] Well, here they were, standing exactly where you are, close to each other. [MURIEL *changes her position.*] I saw her touch his arm. Oh, I'm positive there's something between those two! "You will?" I heard her say. And then he made a remark about Friday—Friday——

MURIEL.

The Duchess goes on Friday.

SOPHY.

That was it, of course! And then she mumbled something I couldn't catch; and then—listen to this!—then she said "to-night," quite plainly. *To-night!* and in such a tone of voice! And then he bowed, and out she came with "to-night" again—"to-night," for the second time—and away she went. Now, what do you think that "to-night" of hers means?

MURIEL.

[*Coldly, seating herself upon the bench.*] Nothing—anything.

SOPHY.

Nothing!

MURIEL.

A hundred topics of conversation would lead to such an expression. [*Looking at* SOPHY *steadily.*] You are mistaken in the construction you put upon it.

SOPHY.

[*Quietly.*] Mistaken, am I?

MURIEL.

[*With clenched hands.*] The Duchess of Strood is a most immaculate woman. [*Suddenly.*] Oh, it would be too infamous!

[*The* DUCHESS *and* FRAYNE, *followed by* MRS. EDEN, *reappear behind the low hedge.* SOPHY *retreats to the back of the bench upon which* MURIEL *is sitting. The* DUCHESS *and* FRAYNE *approach, talking, while* MRS. EDEN *chats to* SOPHY *across the hedge.*]

FRAYNE.

[*To the* DUCHESS, *gallantly.*] I am flattered by your remembrance of me, Duchess. When we last met I had hardly a grey hair in my head. [*Running his hand through his hair.*] Ha! The West Coast——!

DUCHESS.

Is the climate so terrible?

FRAYNE.

Deadly. But the worst of it is [*with a bow and a sigh*], we have no European ladies.

[MURIEL—*eyeing the* DUCHESS—*rises, shrinkingly, and steals away.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Looking after* MURIEL.] Quex! ha, there's a lucky dog, now!

DUCHESS.

[*Sweetly.*] You are delighted, naturally, at your old friend's approaching marriage?

FRAYNE.

[*Kissing his finger-tips toward the left.*] Miss Eden—! [*Inquisitively.*] And—and *you,* Duchess?

DUCHESS.

[*Raising her eyebrows.*] I?

FRAYNE.

You also approve his choice?

DUCHESS.

[*Blandly.*] Approve? I am scarcely sufficiently intimate with either party to express approval or disapproval.

FRAYNE.

[*Eyeing her askance.*] Pardon. I thought you had known Quex for—ah—some years.

DUCHESS.

Quite superficially. I should describe him rather as a great friend of his Grace.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *appears on the top of the steps.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Are you here, Duchess?

DUCHESS.

[*Turning to her.*] Yes.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Coming down the steps.*] Oh, I am really very upset!

DUCHESS.

Upset?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

About your maid. The circumstance has only just been reported to me—you have lost your maid. [*Seeing* FRAYNE.] Is that Sir Chichester? [FRAYNE *advances and shakes hands.*] I didn't observe you, in the dusk. Have you seen Henry? I wonder if he is waiting for us in the drawing-room?

FRAYNE.

May I go and hunt for him?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

It would be kind of you.

[FRAYNE *goes up the steps and away.* MRS. EDEN *comes to the stone bench.* MURIEL *returns slowly, coming from among the trees and appearing on the further side of the low hedge.*]

DUCHESS.

[*To* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Pray don't be in the least concerned for me, dear Lady Owbridge; the absence of my maid is quite a temporary matter. Poor Watson's father is unwell and I packed her off to him this afternoon. She will be back by mid-day to-morrow, she promises me.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

But, dear me! in the meantime my own woman shall wait upon you.

DUCHESS.

I couldn't dream of it.

MRS. EDEN.

Why not my Gilchrist—or let us share her?

DUCHESS.

No, no; the housemaid who assisted me into this gown——

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Chalmers? well, there's Chalmers, certainly. But I fear that Chalmers has hot hands. Or Denham—no, Denham is suffering from a bad knee. Of course, there's Bruce! Bruce is painfully near-sighted—but would Bruce do? Or little Atkins——?

SOPHY.

[*Stepping from behind the bench, and confronting* LADY OWBRIDGE—*in a quiet voice.*] Or I, my lady?

LADY OWBRIDGE.

You, my dear?

SOPHY.

Why shouldn't *I* attend upon her Grace to-night and in the morning? [*With half a courtesy to the* DUCHESS.] I should dearly like to have the honour.

[MURIEL *comes forward, staring at* SOPHY.]

MRS. EDEN.

Now, that's very proper and good-natured of you, Sophy.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

But, Miss Fullgarney——

SOPHY.

[*Modestly.*] Oh, I never feel like Miss Fullgarney out of my business, my lady. You see, I was maid for years, and it's second nature to me. Do let me, my lady—do your Grace!

MRS. EDEN.

Duchess——?

DUCHESS.

[*Hesitatingly.*] Oh—oh, by all means. [*To* SOPHY.] Thank you.

[*The gong sounds in the distance again, as* QUEX—*now in evening-dress—and* FRAYNE *return together, above the hedge.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

Here is Quex.

[*The ladies, except* MURIEL, *join* FRAYNE *and* QUEX.]

MURIEL.

[*To* SOPHY.] What are you doing?

SOPHY.

[*Breathlessly.*] The housekeeper showed me over the house. I remember—her maid's room is at the end of a passage leading from the boudoir!

MURIEL.

Sophy, you must not! you sha'n't!

SOPHY.

Why, isn't it for the best? If I was mistaken over what I heard just now, I sha'n't see or hear anything wicked to-night; and that will satisfy both of us——!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*Calling.*] Muriel——

[MURIEL *joins the group;* SOPHY *slips away and disappears.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*To the* DUCHESS.] Shall we go in?

[LADY OWBRIDGE *and the* DUCHESS, *and* MRS. EDEN *and* MURIEL, *ascend the steps and go toward the house. Instead of following the ladies,* QUEX *turns sharply and comes forward with an angry, sullen look upon his face.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Looking round for* QUEX.] Hallo, Harry! [*Coming to* QUEX.] Aren't you——?

QUEX.

Hang dinner! I don't want to eat.

FRAYNE.

Anything wrong, old man? anything I——?

QUEX.

[*Shaking himself up.*] No, no; nothing—the hot weather. Come along; we mustn't be late for grace. [*Boisterously.*] At any rate, a glass of champagne—[*slapping* FRAYNE *on the back*] a glass or two of Félix Poubelle, hey? Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or! ha, ha, ha!

[*As they turn to go, they see* SOPHY *on the other side of the hedge, looking at them steadily.*]

QUEX.

[*To* FRAYNE, *quietly.*] Wait!

[*They stand still, while* SOPHY *very demurely walks to the steps, ascends them, and disappears.*]

QUEX.

[*In an altered tone.*] Chick—you see that hussy?

FRAYNE.

Miss Fullgarney?

QUEX.

I can't make her out. I believe she wants to play some trick on me.

FRAYNE.

Trick?

QUEX.

'Pon my soul, I believe she's prying—spying on me.

FRAYNE.

That nice gal!

QUEX.

Oh, I daresay I'm wrong. But if I found it so, I—I'd wring her neck.

FRAYNE.

[*Wistfully.*] It's an alluring neck.

QUEX.

Possibly. But I'd wring it——!

[*They go up the steps together.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The scene represents two rooms—a bedroom and a boudoir—separated by an arched opening across which a portière is hung. The portière is, however, drawn aside, and the bedroom, in which is a bed with an elaborate canopy, is partly revealed. The boudoir is nearest to the spectator. Above the fireplace, with bare hearth, on the right, is a broad window running obliquely toward the centre, concealed by heavy curtains. On the left of the window, facing the audience, is a door admitting to a long, narrow passage in which a hanging lamp is burning; and on the left of this door is the arched opening dividing the bedroom from the boudoir. Another door opens into the boudoir on the opposite side from a corridor or landing. Beyond this door, against the wall, is a cabinet, on top of which is a clock. A chair stands at each end of this cabinet. On the left of the arched opening—placed obliquely, the mirror turned from the audience—is a cheval-glass; and on the right is a sculptured figure or ornamental pillar supporting a lighted lamp. Before the window stands a large dressing-table. On the table are a pair of candelabra with lighted candles, a looking-glass, toilet-bottles, and a hand-mirror. A chair faces the dressing-table. Nearer to the spectator are a writing-table, with a heap of French novels on it, and an arm-chair. Opposite stand a circular table, an arm-chair, and a settee. A silver box containing cigarettes, an ash-tray, a match-stand, and a lighted spirit-lamp are on this table.

The rooms are richly furnished and decorated, but in an old-fashioned and formal manner. Everything

is subdued and faded in tone. There are no pillows upon the chairs, nor on the settee, nor any other signs of ease and comfort. Keys are in the locks of both the doors.

[*The* DUCHESS *and* MRS. EDEN *are seated—the* DUCHESS *in the arm-chair,* MRS. EDEN *upon the settee—smoking cigarettes.* MRS. EDEN *is wearing a smart dressing-jacket; the* DUCHESS *is still fully dressed.* SOPHY, *who has assumed an apron, is engaged in bringing hair-brushes and some toilet-bottles from the bedroom and in arranging them upon the dressing-table. Her eyes are constantly upon the* DUCHESS.]

MRS. EDEN.

These are awfully pleasant cigarettes. I didn't know you——

DUCHESS.

[*Plaintively.*] My doctor insists—for my nerves.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Blowing rings.*] I love smoking. Such a bore, because women are rather dropping it. [*Examining her cigarette.*] What *are* these?

DUCHESS.

I forget.

MRS. EDEN.

I see—Argyropulos.

[*There is a knock at the door.* SOPHY *goes to the door and opens it slightly; a note is handed to her.*]

SOPHY.

[*Looking at the note.*] Oh, thanks. [*Closing the door.*] I beg your pardon, your Grace—it's for me. [*She returns to the dressing-table, reading the note.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Jestingly.*] Ah, Sophy! you must encourage no more sweethearts now, remember.

SOPHY.

This is from *him,* Mrs. Eden—from Mr. Valma, saying good-night. He's gone to bed.

MRS. EDEN.

Good gracious! how do *you* know?

SOPHY.

Mrs. Gregory, the house-keeper, has allowed him to sleep here to-night, so that we may go back together in the morning.

MRS. EDEN.

Ah, yes.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking off her bracelets.*] My jewel-case, Sophy.

[SOPHY *puts the note to her lips, slips it into the bodice of her dress, and re-enters the bedroom.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*To the* DUCHESS.] By-the-by, what *did* Valma see in your hand, Duchess, after dinner? Why wouldn't you tell us?

DUCHESS.

I was too vexed at the moment. [*With downcast eyes.*] He professed to discover that a number of men are in love with me.

MRS. EDEN.

Yes, but what made you angry?

DUCHESS.

Why, *that.*

MRS. EDEN.

That!

DUCHESS.

They were shocking words to listen to, even when spoken by a mere fortune-teller. And you—why did *you* not confide to us the result of Mr. Valma's reading of your palm?

[SOPHY *comes from the bedroom, carrying a jewel-case, which she deposits upon the dressing-table.*]

MRS. EDEN.

I was in a rage too. Ha! there's only *one* man in love with *me,* it appears.

DUCHESS.

[*With a shudder.*] One is sufficiently dreadful.

MRS. EDEN.

Horrid! [*Making a moue.*] It's Jack—my husband!

DUCHESS.

[*Reprovingly.*] Hush, dear Mrs. Eden! Sophy—— [SOPHY *comes to the* DUCHESS. *Languidly.*] I shall read for half an hour before attempting to sleep. Put me into something loose.

SOPHY.

Yes, your Grace.

[SOPHY *again retires to the bedroom.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Rising.*] May I look at your literature?

[MRS. EDEN *goes to the writing-table and turns over the books she finds there. The* DUCHESS *glances at the clock, and eyes* MRS. EDEN *with impatience.*]

MRS. EDEN.

"Le Calvaire d'une vierge." "Lune de Miel." "Les Adventures de Madame Plon." Oh, I've heard of this! this is a little—h'm!—isn't it?

DUCHESS.

I read those things for the sake of their exquisitely polished style; the subjects escape me.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Seating herself by the writing-table and dipping into "Madame Plon."*] Ah, yes, the style—the style. [*Absorbed.*] We haven't much real literary style in England, have we?

[SOPHY *returns, carrying a pink tea-gown trimmed with green ribbons, and a richly embroidered Mandarin's robe.*]

SOPHY.

Will your Grace put on one of these? [*With a curl of the lip.*] They're both very becoming, I should think.

DUCHESS.

[*Smiling sadly.*] Becoming! as if that mattered, child!

SOPHY.

Which will your Grace——?

DUCHESS.

[*To herself, closing her eyes.*] *Couleur de rose*—[*to* SOPHY] er—that pink rag. Take off my collarette.

[SOPHY *lays the tea-gown and the robe over the back of the settee and proceeds to unfasten the* DUCHESS'S *pearl collarette.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Startled by some passage in the book she is reading.*] Oh, I *say!*

DUCHESS.

What, dear Mrs. Eden?

MRS. EDEN.

[*Bethinking herself—soberly.*] Ah, yes, the style is excellent, isn't it?

DUCHESS.

[*To* SOPHY, *while the collarette is in process of removal.*] Have you everything you require for the night, child?

SOPHY.

Yes, thank you, your Grace. Miss Gilchrist, Mrs. Eden's maid, has lent me a night-gown and a pair of slippers.

DUCHESS.

[*Handing her bracelets to* SOPHY.] Drop them into the case.

[SOPHY *puts the collarette and bracelets in the jewel-case. The* DUCHESS, *rising, again looks at the clock and at* MRS. EDEN. SOPHY *returns to the* DUCHESS, *who is now behind the settee.*]

DUCHESS.

[*To* SOPHY.] It is very good of you, Sophy, to attend upon me.

SOPHY.

[*Averting her head.*] Not at all, your Grace.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking up the Mandarin's robe.*] Here is a pretty thing for you. [*Giving the robe to* SOPHY.] Wear it to dress your hair in, in the morning.

SOPHY.

[*Breathing shortly.*] Oh, no, your Grace—please——!

DUCHESS.

Nonsense, child; take it.

[SOPHY, *somewhat out of countenance, lays the robe over the back of the chair.*]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Looking up.*] Well, you are a lucky girl, Sophy!

SOPHY.

Yes, I know it's very beautiful; [*returning to the* DUCHESS] but I—I think I'd rather not——

DUCHESS.

Tsch, tsch! help me. [*The* DUCHESS *is standing before the cheval-glass, which conceals her from the audience. With* SOPHY'S *aid, she slips out of her dress and puts herself into the tea-gown, while she talks to* MRS. EDEN.] Miss Eden is not well to-night, I am afraid. She didn't come into the drawing-room.

[MRS. EDEN *rises and goes to the settee, upon which she partly kneels while she chatters to the* DUCHESS.]

MRS. EDEN.

She complained of headache and bolted upstairs. Muriel is such an odd girl at times.

DUCHESS.

A sweet one.

MRS. EDEN.

Perfectly adorable. Only I wish she wasn't so moody and uncertain.

DUCHESS.

But a headache—[*sympathetically*] dear child!

MRS. EDEN.

An engaged girl ought not to have a headache—no girl ought. It's just one of those things that make a man ponder.

DUCHESS.

Ponder?

MRS. EDEN.

Reflect. A man loves to think a girl is like an angel—beautiful pink and white right through, with no clockwork. The moment she complains of headache, or toothache, or a chilblain on the heel, the angel game is off, and she's got to try and hold her own as a simple mortal. And as a mortal she's not in it with a man. No, it's angel or nothing with us women. I remember my Mater saying to me when I was engaged to Jack, "Sybil, now mind! enjoy the very best of health till you have been married at least ten years; and then be sure you have an excellent motive for cracking-up." [*The clock tinkles out the half-hour. She glances at the clock.*] Half-past eleven! the dead of night for this house! [*Rising.*] I'll be off to my cot.

[SOPHY *carries the* DUCHESS'S *dress into the bedroom.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Coming to* MRS. EDEN.] *Must* you? Good-night.

MRS. EDEN.

So nice of you to allow me this gossip.

DUCHESS.

Delighted. [*They kiss affectionately.*]

MRS. EDEN.

We go shopping together to-morrow, do we not?

DUCHESS.

Yes, yes.

MRS. EDEN.

[*With exaggerated regret.*] To-morrow! your last day here! misery! [*At the door, finding she still has "Madame Plon" in her hand.*] Oh! do you happen to be on this one?

DUCHESS.

Not that one.

MRS. EDEN.

I wonder whether you'd lend it to me?

DUCHESS.

Gladly.

MRS. EDEN.

As you say, there is something about these French writers——

DUCHESS.

Style.

MRS. EDEN.

That's it—style. [*Opening the door.*] Ah! lights out.

DUCHESS.

Can you see?

MRS. EDEN.

[*Going out.*] There's just a glimmer——

[*She disappears.*]

DUCHESS.

I'll keep the door open till you have turned the corner.

[SOPHY *comes back and stands watching the* DUCHESS. *The* DUCHESS *remains at the open door for a little while, then kisses her hand to* MRS. EDEN *and closes the door.*]

SOPHY.

Shall I brush your Grace's hair now?

DUCHESS.

[*Going to the writing-table and taking up a book.*] No. I will do it. The exertion of brushing my hair, I often find, encourages sleep. I'll put myself to bed. Run away. Don't let me see or hear anything of you till the morning. Eight o'clock. [*She reclines upon the settee and opens her book.* SOPHY, *eyeing her keenly, is about to withdraw.*] Oh—Sophy! [SOPHY *returns.*] Do you—believe in Mr. Valma?

SOPHY.

Believe in him, your Grace?

DUCHESS.

Believe that when he reads a woman's hand he has really the power of divination—the power he professes?

SOPHY.

Oh, yes.

DUCHESS.

[*Looking away.*] Then if he tells a woman that a great many men are deeply in love with her, you—you——?

SOPHY.

I'm sure he knows what he's talking about.

DUCHESS.

[*With a little purr of contentment.*] Ah! [*Assuming indifference.*] I heard recently of an instance of his having conjectured such a state of affairs from the lines of a woman's hand. [*Severely.*] I could only hope that his surmise was an incorrect one.

SOPHY.

[*Her eyes flashing scornfully.*] You see, your Grace, if a woman is pretty, and Valma finds Venus's girdle well

marked in her palm; and if he concludes from other signs that she's vain and light and loose; it isn't much to suppose that there are a few horrid men licking their lips at the thought of her.

DUCHESS.

[*Shocked.*] My good girl! what curious expressions you make use of! [*Resuming her reading.*] That's all.

(SOPHY *goes to the door and opens it.*]

SOPHY.

I wish your Grace good-night.

DUCHESS.

[*Raising her head for a moment.*] Good-night. You are not taking your robe.

[SOPHY *looks at the robe and hesitates; in the end she gathers it up uneasily.*]

SOPHY.

I—I am very much obliged to your Grace——

DUCHESS.

Yes, you have thanked me enough. Turn out the lamp in that passage.

SOPHY.

Certainly, your Grace.

[SOPHY *disappears, shutting the door after her. The* DUCHESS *remains quite still for a moment, then rises promptly, replaces her book, and—seating herself at the dressing-table—puts her hair in order. This done, she takes up the hand-mirror and smiles, frowns, and looks caressingly at herself. Then she lays the hand-mirror aside, blows out the candles upon the dressing-table, and poses before the cheval-*

glass. Ultimately, completely assured as to her appearance, she cautiously opens the door at which SOPHY *has departed, and, going a few steps along the passage, listens with strained ears. The passage is now in darkness. Apparently satisfied, the* DUCHESS *returns, and, closing the door gently, turns the key in the lock. Her next proceeding is to attempt to tear one of the ribbons from her tea-gown. Failing in this, she detaches it with the aid of a pair of scissors, and, opening the door leading from the corridor, ties the ribbon to the outer door-handle. Whereupon she closes the door and walks about the room contentedly. Suddenly she pauses, and, going to the cabinet, produces a small tray on which are a bottle of champagne and a champagne glass. Placing the tray on the circular table, she regards the single glass thoughtfully. Then, as if struck by an idea, she disappears into the bedroom. After a brief interval, the door opens softly and* QUEX *enters, carrying a lighted wax match. Being in, he shuts the door silently and looks about the room. Hearing the* DUCHESS *in the adjoining apartment, he frowns and blows out the match. Coming to the circular table, he contemplates the preparation for his reception with distaste; then, flinging the match into the ash-tray, he sits, with a set, determined look upon his face. After another short pause, the* DUCHESS *returns, polishing a tumbler with a cambric handkerchief.* QUEX *rises.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Under her breath.*] Ah! [*He bows stiffly. She places the tumbler on the tray, tosses the handkerchief aside, and—first motioning him to stand away from the line of the door—opens the door, removes the ribbon from the handle, closes and locks it. Then she turns to him with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah—h—h!

QUEX.

[*Coming down gloomily.*] Is it all right?

DUCHESS.

Quite. [*Advancing to him with outstretched hands.*] Welcome, Harry! oh, welcome!

QUEX.

[*Retreating a few steps—firmly.*] One moment. I have something to ask of you, Sidonia. [*Looking round.*] You are sure——?

DUCHESS.

Yes, yes. Only don't raise your voice; [*glancing towards the door*] my maid sleeps in a room at the end of that passage. [*Gracefully seating herself upon the settee and motioning to him to sit beside her.*] Sit down. Oh, the woe of this final meeting! the pathos of it!

QUEX.

[*Bitterly, withdrawing the chair a little further from the table.*] Yes, I agree with you—there *is* an element of wofulness in this meeting; it is not altogether without pathos.

DUCHESS.

Not altogether!

QUEX.

[*Sitting, facing her.*] But, for yourself, my dear Sidonia —well, I have the consolation of believing that directly you turn your back upon Fauncey Court much of the wofulness of your position will evaporate.

DUCHESS.

Harry!

QUEX.

Forgive me—you admit that you delight in colouring even the most ordinary events of life rather highly. If I

may put it more roughly, you are disposed, my dear Sidonia, —at times, perhaps, a little inopportunely—to burn a good deal of red fire. [*Leaning forward.*] At any rate, I beg an especial favor of you to-night.

DUCHESS.

What—?

QUEX.

[*Distinctly.*] No red fire.

DUCHESS.

[*Chilled.*] Is this the something you had to ask of me? [*He bows in assent.*] I cannot remember ever having seen you in this mood.

QUEX.

This is our first actual *tête-à-tête* since my engagement to Miss Eden.

DUCHESS.

Oh, I understand.

QUEX.

And now shall I tell you where the wofulness and the pathos most conspicuously display themselves on this occasion?

DUCHESS.

If you wish to.

QUEX.

In the confounded treachery of my being here at all.

DUCHESS.

Treachery?

QUEX.

You know I am under a bond of good behaviour to my old aunt and to the Edens.

DUCHESS.

[*With a slight shrug of the shoulders.*] Really?

QUEX.

Yes. [*Clenching his teeth.*] And this is how I observe it. After all my resolutions, this—this is how I observe it. [*He rises and paces up and down the room.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Fretfully.*] I am bound to remark that your present behaviour appears quite unimpeachable.

QUEX.

Unimpeachable! here—alone—in your company!

DUCHESS.

[*Covering her eyes with her hand.*] Oh, cruel, cruel!

QUEX.

[*Pausing.*] Cruel——?

DUCHESS.

[*With heaving bosom.*] But there! if you deny me the possession of real feeling, why should you hesitate to rain blows on me?

QUEX.

[*Softening, coming to her.*] My dear Sidonia, I don't —I don't mean to——

DUCHESS.

[*Rising, and grasping his hands.*] Oh, Harry!

QUEX.

Tsch! please! [*He releases himself and she sinks back upon the settee, her eyes closed. He regards her uncomfortably for a moment; then, with some hesitation, he produces from his coat-tail pocket a small box covered with a pretty brocade, with which he toys uneasily.*] You ex-

pressed a wish to leave here on Friday with a sensation of despair at your heart, Sidonia. If your feeling about our parting is really a deep one, heaven knows I have no desire to make it more acute——

DUCHESS.

[*Partly opening her eyes.*] What is in that box, Harry?

QUEX.

That is just what I was about to—to—[*Lifting the lid and closing it.*] These are the little souvenirs which have passed from you to me at odd times.

DUCHESS.

[*With reviving interest.*] Ah, yes.

QUEX.

I have had no other opportunity—[*Looking about him awkwardly for a place to deposit the box.*] Will you—? shall I—? what the devil's to become of 'em?

DUCHESS.

[*Sitting upright and passing her hand over her back hair.*] Were there a fire, we could crouch over it and watch the flames consume them one by one.

QUEX.

But there isn't a fire.

DUCHESS.

[*Rising, and taking the box from him.*] Let us examine them.

QUEX.

No, no, no.

DUCHESS.

Yes, yes. [*Opening the box and gazing into it.*] Ah, poor little objects! dead, yet animate; silent, yet, oh, how eloquent! Don't go away——

[*She overturns the contents of the box on to the table. They stand opposite each other, looking down upon the litter.*]

DUCHESS.

[*She picks up a ring.*] A ring—[*thoughtfully*] turquoise and pearl. [*Recollecting.*] Stockholm! You remember—that night you and I sat watching the lights of the café on the Norrbro——!

QUEX.

[*Hastily.*] Yes, yes! you've recalled it already to-day.

DUCHESS.

[*Picking up a scarf-pin.*] A scarf-pin. Copenhagen! Ah, that pretty state-room of mine on the *Irene!*

QUEX.

Yes, yes, charming.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking up a locket.*] A locket—my name in brilliants. Genoa! Look, it still contains my hair.

QUEX.

[*Nodding.*] H'm, um.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking up a white shoe.*] My shoe. Where——?

QUEX.

[*Shaking his head.*] I don't——

DUCHESS.

Mentone!

QUEX.

Of course—Mentone.

DUCHESS.

[*Discovering some object in the shoe.*] What is this? [*Producing a garter of pale-blue silk, with a diamond buckle.*] A—a—where—? ah, yes. [*Replacing the things in the box.*] Oh, the poor little objects! dead, yet animate; silent, yet, oh, how eloquent!

[*She passes him and slips the box into the drawer of the writing table. The clock strikes a quarter to twelve.*]

QUEX.

[*Glancing at the clock.*] By Jove, it's late! I—I'll leave you now, Sidonia.

DUCHESS.

[*Turning.*] No, no—not yet, Harry. [*Coming to the table and taking up the box of cigarettes.*] Why, you forget—[*offering him the box*] Argyropulos!

QUEX.

[*Accepting a cigarette reluctantly.*] Thanks. [*Again looking at the clock.*] Well—three minutes.

DUCHESS.

[*Taking a cigarette, replacing the box, and holding the spirit lamp while he lights his cigarette from it.*] You were not always so impatient. [*In lighting his cigarette, the flame of the lamp is blown out.*] Ah! [*After replacing the lamp, she lights her cigarette from his, gazing into his eyes.*] Argyropulos. [*Dreamily.*] Once more—Argyropulos.

QUEX.

Yes, yes—capital tobacco. [*He gets away from her.*]

DUCHESS.

And look! you see, Harry?

QUEX.

[*Turning.*] Eh?

DUCHESS.

[*Pointing to the bottle of champagne.*] "Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or"! [*Taking up the scissors which she has left upon the table.*] The wire is already severed.

[*She commences to cut the string. He comes to her.*]

QUEX.

[*Taking the scissors from her.*] Oh, permit me.

[*Always intent upon avoiding her, he moves away, the bottle in his hand, cutting the string.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Following him.*] Is it likely to make a loud report?

QUEX.

Hardly.

DUCHESS.

[*Frowning censoriously.*] One doesn't want a sound of that sort to ring through the corridors. [*Looking about her impatiently.*] These formal, frigid rooms!

[*She runs lightly into the bedroom, snatches a pillow from the bed, and returns to him.*]

QUEX.

[*His hand upon the cork.*] What is that for?

DUCHESS.

[*Enveloping his hand and the bottle in the pillow—calmly.*] It is wiser to muffle it.

[*He pauses, looking at her fixedly.*]

QUEX.

[*In a low, grave voice.*] Dolly——

DUCHESS.

Dolly! [*Closing her eyes.*] You give me my pet name again!

QUEX.

Ah, Dolly, if only there wasn't quite so much in one's life—to muffle! [*He pulls the cork. She tosses the pillow on to the settee, a little irritably.*] May I——?

[*She inclines her head. He pours wine into the glasses; she takes the champagne glass, he the tumbler.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Sentimentally.*] Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or! [*Looking at him over the brim of her glass.*] *Eh bien! au joyeux passé!*

QUEX.

Non, non—à un avenir meilleur!

DUCHESS.

Que vous êtes prosaïque! soit! [*They drink.*]
[*She sits with a sigh of dissatisfaction.*] Ah!

QUEX.

[*Leaning against the table, drinking his wine.*] Wonderful wine—really exceptional. [*Struck by a thought, turning to her.*] Forgive me—you must have found some difficulty in introducing Monsieur Félix Poubelle into this hallowed apartment.

DUCHESS.

No. [*Sipping her wine.*] My maid thinks it is by my doctor's orders.

QUEX.

Your maid, yes—[*sipping his wine; then sitting upon the settee, glass in hand*]—but my poor aunt must be highly scandalized.

DUCHESS.

[*Her glass at her lips.*] Dear Lady Owbridge will not know. I told the girl to coax it out of the butler, as if it were for herself. These women have a way of doing such things.

QUEX.

[*Laughing rather sadly.*] Ha, ha, ha! who is beyond temptation? Not even old Bristow—sixty if he's a day.

DUCHESS.

[*Shrugging her shoulders.*] Sixty or sixteen—when a girl is fascinating——

QUEX.

Fascinating! your woman, Watson!

DUCHESS.

No, no—Watson has left me for a few hours. I am speaking of Sophy.

[*There is a brief silence.* QUEX, *surprised in the act of drinking, lowers his glass slowly.*]

QUEX.

[*In a queer voice.*] Sophy?

DUCHESS.

Miss Fullgarney, the manicurist. She was so good as to offer to take Watson's place for to-night.

QUEX.

[*Looking steadily before him.*] Oh?

[*There is another pause. The* DUCHESS *puts down her glass and, with her foot, pushes the footstool toward* QUEX.]

DUCHESS.

[*Sliding from her chair on to the footstool.*] Oh, Harry, the bitterness of this final meeting! the dull agony of it!

[*He gets rid of his tumbler and touches her arm.*]

QUEX.

[*Quietly.*] Duchess——

DUCHESS.

[*Surprised.*] Eh?

QUEX.

I am sorry to alarm you, but this girl—Miss Eden's foster-sister——

DUCHESS.

What about her?

QUEX.

She's a cat.

DUCHESS.

Cat!

QUEX.

[*Gathering his ideas as he proceeds.*] A common hussy, not above playing tricks—spying——

DUCHESS.

Spying!

QUEX.

I caught her behind the hedge this evening, in the Italian garden, after you and I had been talking together.

DUCHESS.

Behind the hedge!

QUEX.

She had previously done her best to make an ass of me, while you were dressing for dinner——! [*Looking toward the passage-door.*] Where do you say her room is?

DUCHESS.

At the end of that passage. [*They rise together, with very little movement.*] Oh, but she is in bed, and asleep!

QUEX.

Is she?

DUCHESS.

Harry!

QUEX.

Wait——! [*He goes to the door, and examines the key-hole. Then he turns to the* DUCHESS *and beckons to her. She joins him. He says, in a whisper, pointing to the key-hole.*] Do you notice——?

DUCHESS.

What?

QUEX.

The key is in the lock horizontally.

DUCHESS.

She may have been peeping at us? [*He nods. She is sick at the thought.*] How inexcusably careless of me!

QUEX.

[*At her elbow.*] Listen. I'll keep out of sight. Open the door boldly and walk along the passage. See if there is any sign of movement——

DUCHESS.

Yes, yes. [*Steadying herself.*] Perhaps we are disturbing ourselves unnecessarily.

QUEX.

[*Nodding reassuringly.*] Perhaps so.

[*He draws back into the bedroom, but so that he can put his head out at the opening, and watch the* DUCHESS'S *proceedings. She goes to the door and lays her hand upon the key.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Faltering.*] Oh! oh, great heavens!

QUEX.

[*Encouragingly.*] It's all right—it's all right. Very likely I am mistaken. Now!

[*The* DUCHESS *opens the door suddenly, and* SOPHY, *who is kneeling at the key-hole, lurches forward.*]

DUCHESS.

Ah!

[SOPHY, *enveloped in the Mandarin's robe, gathers herself up and, without a word, flies away along the passage. The* DUCHESS *shuts the door and walks unsteadily to the settee.* QUEX *comes down, his mouth set hard.*]

QUEX.

I was sure of it.

DUCHESS.

[*Aghast.*] What will she do? will she tell?

QUEX.

Yes—she'll tell.

DUCHESS.

Why do you speak so positively?

QUEX.

She is in Miss Eden's confidence—the trull. And she has always shown her teeth at me, now I remember.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Oh, yes, I see—Miss Fullgarney has meant mischief throughout.

DUCHESS.

[*Sinking upon the settee.*] Oh!

QUEX.

[*Quietly.*] Well—*I'm done.*

DUCHESS.

Oh, my reputation!

QUEX.

I'm—done.

DUCHESS.

My reputation! I have never ceased to guard that, as you know.

QUEX.

I've lost her.

DUCHESS.

My reputation!

QUEX.

Of course, I deserve it. But——

[*He sits, his head bowed.*]

DUCHESS.

[*Looking up.*] To think—to think that I allowed this plausible creature to thrust herself upon me! [*He raises his head, glaring fiercely. She beats the pillow.*] Oh! oh! my reputation in the hands of this low creature!

QUEX.

Ah——! [*With a half-smothered cry he goes to the door and pulls it open. The* DUCHESS *runs after him and seizes his arm.*] I said I'd wring her damned neck—I told Frayne so.

DUCHESS.

[*Pushing him away from the door.*] Don't! don't! violence will not help us. [*She closes the door; he stands clutching the chair by the writing-table. The clock strikes twelve.*] Midnight. [*Leaning upon a chair.*] At any rate, you had better go now.

QUEX.

[*Turning to her.*] I beg your pardon; I regret having lost control of myself.

DUCHESS.

[*Miserably.*] It has been a wretchedly disappointing meeting.

QUEX.

[*Heavily.*] Let us see each other in the morning. [*She nods.*] Be walking in the grounds by nine.

DUCHESS.

Yes. [*Rallying.*] After all, Harry, there may be nothing behind this woman's behaviour. It may have been only the vulgarest curiosity on her part.

QUEX.

[*Incredulously.*] Ha! However, in that case——

DUCHESS.

Money.

QUEX.

Money.

DUCHESS.

I ought to sound her directly she presents herself at my bedside, ought I not?

QUEX.

Earlier—before she has had time to get about the house. Stand at nothing. If she's to be bought, she shall have whatever she demands—any sum!

DUCHESS.

How liberal of you!

[QUEX *walks toward the door, then turns to her.*]

QUEX.

One thing I hope I need hardly say, Duchess?

DUCHESS.

What——?

QUEX.

[*With dignity.*] Worst come to the worst, I shall defend you by every means in my power. *I'm* done, I feel sure [*drawing himself up*]; but, of course, I shall lie for you like the devil.

DUCHESS.

[*Plaintively.*] Thanks. And I have dragged you into it all.

QUEX.

Tsch! [*Bowing stiffly.*] Good-night.

DUCHESS.

Good-night. [*She goes to the table and prepares to remove the tray. Having turned the key of the door,* QUEX *pauses. She says fretfully:*] Oh, why don't you go, Harry?

QUEX.

[*Facing her sharply, a new light in his eyes.*] No! *you* go.

DUCHESS.

[*In astonishment.*] I!

QUEX.

[*Returning to her excitedly.*] I tell you I can't wait through a night of suspense: Quick! [*Pacing the room.*] Leave me to deal with her here, at once.

DUCHESS.

You!

QUEX.

[*Snapping his fingers.*] By Jove, yes!

DUCHESS.

What are you going to do?

QUEX.

Give her a fair chance, and then—spoil her tale against you, in any event.

DUCHESS.

How?

QUEX.

Trust to me. [*Impatiently.*] Go, Duchess.

DUCHESS.

But where? where can I——?

QUEX.

Run away to Mrs. Jack—ask her to let you share her room to-night. [*Pointing to the writing-table.*] Ah—! scribble a message——

[*The* DUCHESS *seats herself at the writing-table and writes agitatedly at his dictation.*]

QUEX.

[*Dictating.*] "The Duchess of Strood has been seized with a dreadful fit of nerves and has gone to Mrs. Eden's room. Come to her there at eight." Lay that upon the bed. [*Indicating the bedroom.*] Is there a door in there?

DUCHESS.

[*Rising breathlessly.*] Yes.

QUEX.

Locked?

DUCHESS.

Yes.

QUEX.

The key. [*Imperatively.*] Give me the key. [*She runs into the bedroom and, having laid the written message upon the bed, disappears for a moment. He refills his tumbler and drinks, chuckling sardonically as he does so.*] Ha, ha, ha! [*She returns with the key, which he pockets.*] The bell that rings in your maid's room——? [*She points to the bell-rope hanging beside the passage-door.*] Good. [*Motioning to her to go.*] Now—— [*She is going toward the other door; he detains her.*] Hist! [*Thoughtfully.*] If anything unusual should occur, remember that we were simply discussing books and pictures in the Italian garden before dinner.

DUCHESS.

[*Intently.*] Books and pictures—of course. [*In an outburst.*] Oh, you are certain you can save my reputation?

QUEX.

[*Politely.*] *Yours* at least, my dear Duchess. Sleep well.

[*She is about to open the door when a thought strikes her and she again runs up to the bed.*]

DUCHESS.

Ah——!

QUEX.

Hey?

[*She returns, carrying her night-dress case—a thing of white satin with a monogram and coronet embroidered upon it. She holds it up to him in explanation;*

he nods, and she lets herself out. He immediately locks the door at which she has departed and slips the key into his waistcoat pocket. This done, he pulls the bell-rope communicating with the maid's room and takes up a position against the wall so that the opening of the passage door conceals him from the view of the person entering. After a pause the door is opened and SOPHY *appears. The frills of her night-dress peep out from under the Mandarin's robe, and she is wearing a pair of scarlet cloth slippers; altogether she presents an odd, fantastic figure. She pauses in the doorway hesitatingly, then steadies herself and, with a defiant air, stalks into the bedroom. Directly she has moved away,* QUEX *softly closes the door, locks it, and pockets the key. Meanwhile* SOPHY, *looking about the bedroom for the* DUCHESS, *discovers the paper upon the bed. She picks it up, reads it, and replaces it, and, coming back into the boudoir, encounters* QUEX.]

SOPHY.

Oh!

QUEX.

[*With a careless nod.*] Ah?

SOPHY.

[*Recovering herself, and speaking with a contemptuous smile.*] So her Grace has packed herself off to Mrs. Eden's room. [*Firmly.*] Who rang for me, please?

QUEX.

I rang.

SOPHY.

You? what for?

QUEX.

Oh, you and I are going to have a cosey little chat together.

SOPHY.

[*Haughtily.*] I don't understand you.

QUEX.

We'll understand one another well enough, in a minute.

[*He lights another cigarette and seats himself upon the settee. She moves to the back of a chair, eyeing him distrustfully.*]

Now then! You've been at the key-hole, have you?

SOPHY.

[*Slightly embarrassed.*] Y—yes.

QUEX.

[*Sharply.*] Eh?

SOPHY.

[*Defiantly.*] Yes; you know I have.

QUEX.

Ah. And I should like to know a little more, while we are upon the delicate subject of spying. When I found you behind the cypress-hedge this evening before dinner——

SOPHY.

Well?

QUEX.

You had just at that moment returned to the Italian garden, you said.

SOPHY.

Yes, so I said.

QUEX.

As a matter of fact, you had been there some time, I presume?

SOPHY.

A minute or two.

QUEX.

Heard anything?

SOPHY.

[*Laughing maliciously.*] Ha, ha, ha! I heard her Grace say, "to-night"—[*faintly mimicking the* DUCHESS] "to-night!" [*With a curl of the lip.*] That was enough for me.

QUEX.

Quite so. You told a deliberate lie, then, when I questioned you?

SOPHY.

Yes.

QUEX.

Earlier in the evening, that manicure game of yours—nothing but a damned cunning trick, eh?

SOPHY.

I beg you won't use such language.

QUEX.

A trick, eh?

SOPHY.

Certainly.

QUEX.

You wanted—what did you want?

SOPHY.

[*Disdainfully.*] A kiss, or a squeeze of the waist—anything of that sort would have done.

QUEX.

Oh, would it? You didn't get what you wanted, though.

SOPHY.

No; I suppose you were frightened.

QUEX.

[*Angrily.*] What!

SOPHY.

Too many people about for you.

QUEX.

[*Stifling his annoyance.*] Tsch! If I had—[*with a wave of the hand*] what course would you have taken, pray?

SOPHY.

[*With an air of great propriety.*] Complained at once to Lady Owbridge.

QUEX.

As it is—what do you think of doing now?

SOPHY.

About you and her Grace?

QUEX.

[*Scowling.*] Yes.

SOPHY.

Oh, tell the ladies in the morning, first thing.

QUEX.

[*Again putting a check upon himself.*] Ha, ha! Why do you behave in this contemptible way?

SOPHY.

It isn't contemptible.

QUEX.

Isn't it?

SOPHY.

Not under the circumstances.

QUEX.

What circumstances?

SOPHY.

[*Hotly.*] A wicked man like you engaged to a sweet girl like Miss Muriel!

QUEX.

I see. [*Politely.*] You don't approve of the engagement?

SOPHY.

Should think not!

QUEX.

Always done your best to poison Miss Eden's mind against me, I expect?

SOPHY.

Always let her know my opinion of you. And I was right!

QUEX.

Right?

SOPHY.

This very day, poor thing, she was saying how proud she is of you because you've turned over a new leaf for her sake; and I told her what *your* promises are worth. Yes, I was right! And now I can prove it!

[*He rises; she hastily places herself on the other side of the chair.*]

QUEX.

Look here! [*Leaning against the table, the chair being between him and* SOPHY.] What will you take to hold your tongue?

SOPHY.

Nothing.

QUEX.

Oh, but wait. This isn't a matter of a handful of sovereigns. I'll give you a couple of thousand pounds to keep quiet about this.

SOPHY.

No, thank you, my lord.

QUEX.

Four thousand.

SOPHY.

[*Shaking her head.*] No.

QUEX.

Five.

SOPHY.

No.

QUEX.

How much?

SOPHY.

Not twenty thousand. I'm extremely comfortably off, my lord, but if I wasn't I wouldn't accept a penny of your money. All I wish is to save Miss Muriel from marrying a—a gentleman who isn't fit for her. And that's what I intend doing.

[*They stand looking at each other for a moment, silently; then he walks away, thoughtfully.*]

QUEX.

[*In an altered tone.*] Come here.

SOPHY.

[*With an eye on the door.*] Certainly not.

QUEX.

As you please. Miss Fullgarney——

SOPHY.

I hear you.

QUEX.

I should like to settle this business with you pleasantly —if possible. Allow me to say this. I don't think I am quite such an atrocious person as you appear to believe; in fact I can assure you I am not.

SOPHY.

[*Gathering her robe about her and advancing a few steps.*] You must excuse me, my lord, but—[*glancing round the room*] you evidently forget where you are.

QUEX.

No, I don't; but I tell you—I tell you sincerely—that my visit to her Grace to-night was an innocent one.

SOPHY.

[*Turning her head away, in great disdain.*] Really!

QUEX.

Really. You won't accept money?

SOPHY.

No, indeed, I will not.

QUEX.

Very well. Ha! it's an odd attitude for a man like myself to adopt toward—[*Indicating* SOPHY *by a motion of the hand.*] But I make an appeal to you.

SOPHY.

[*Elevating her eyebrows.*] Appeal?

QUEX.

[*With simple feeling and dignity.*] I love Miss Eden. I would be a good husband to that young lady. Let me off.

SOPHY.

Let you off?

QUEX.

Don't tell on me. Don't try to rob me of Miss Eden. Let me off.

SOPHY.

I'm sorry to say I can't, my lord.

QUEX.

You won't?

SOPHY.

I won't. [*With a slight inclination of the head* QUEX *turns away and stands leaning against the settee with his back toward* SOPHY. *The clock strikes the quarter-of-an hour. There is a short silence.*] If your lordship has quite done with me——? [*He makes no response. She tosses her head.*] I wish you good-night, my lord. [*She goes to the passage-door and turns the handle.*] It's locked. This door's locked. [*Looking at him.*] The door's locked. [*Rattling at the door-handle.*] Where's the key? [*Searching about on the floor near the door.*] Where's the——? [*Coming forward a step or two.*] Has your lordship got the key of this door? [*Still obtaining no answer, she stands staring at him for a moment; then she goes quickly to the other door and tries the handle. As she does so,* QUEX *turns sharply and, leaning upon the back of the settee, watches her. After shaking the door-handle vigorously, she wheels round and faces him, indignantly.*] What's the meaning of this?

QUEX.

[*Grimly.*] Ah!

SOPHY.

Oh——! [*She sweeps round to avoid him, and then runs into the bedroom. When she has gone he seats himself in the chair by the writing-table in a lazy attitude, his legs stretched out, his hands in his pockets. After a moment or two she returns breathlessly.*] I'm locked in!

QUEX.

Yes.

SOPHY.

You have locked me in!

QUEX.

Yes.

SOPHY.

How dare you!

QUEX.

Why, you didn't think you were going to have it *all* your own way, did you, Sophy?

SOPHY.

I'll thank you to be less familiar. Let me out.

QUEX.

Not I.

SOPHY.

You let me out directly.

QUEX.

[*Pointing a finger at her.*] You'll gain nothing by raging, my good girl. Ha! now you appreciate the curiously awkward position in which you have placed yourself.

SOPHY.

I've placed myself in no——

QUEX.

Oh, come, come! Taking me at my blackest, I'm not quite the kind of man that a young woman who prides herself upon her respectability desires to be mixed up with in this fashion.

SOPHY.

Mixed up with!

QUEX.

Well—[*stretching out his arms*] here we are, you know.

SOPHY.

Here we are!

QUEX.

You and I, dear Sophy. [*Putting his leg over the arm of his chair.*] Now just sit down——

SOPHY.

I sha'n't.

QUEX.

While I picture to you what will happen in the morning.

SOPHY.

In the morning?

QUEX.

In a few hours' time. In the first place, you will be called in your room. You won't be there.

SOPHY.

Won't I!

QUEX.

No. You won't be there. A little later my man will come to *my* room. I sha'n't be there. At about the same hour, her Grace will require your attendance. Where will *you* be? She will then, naturally, desire to return to her own apartments. You are intelligent enough, I fancy, to

imagine the rest. [*After a brief pause, she breaks into a peal of soft, derisive laughter.*] I am deeply flattered by your enjoyment of the prospect.

SOPHY.

Ha, ha, ha! why, you must take me for a fool!

QUEX.

Why?

SOPHY.

Why, can't you see that our being found together like this, here or anywhere, would do for *you* as well as for me?

QUEX.

[*Rising.*] Of course I see it. [*Advancing to her.*] But, my dear Sophy, *I* am already done for. You provide for that. And so, if I have to part with my last shred of character, I will lose it in association with a woman of your class rather than with a lady whom I, with the rest of the world, hold in the highest esteem.

SOPHY.

[*After a pause.*] Ho! oh, indeed?

QUEX.

Yes. Yes, indeed.

SOPHY.

[*With a shade less confidence.*] Ha, ha! if your lordship thinks to frighten me, you've got hold of the wrong customer. Ha, ha, ha! two or three things you haven't reckoned for, I can assure you. Here's one—I told Miss Muriel exactly what I heard, between you and your Duchess, in the garden this evening.

QUEX.

[*Grinding his teeth.*] You did! [*Involuntarily making a threatening movement toward her.*] You did, you——!

SOPHY.

[*Cowering over the settee.*] Oh!

QUEX.

[*Recovering himself.*] Oh, you did, did you?

SOPHY.

[*Facing him defiantly.*] Yes, I did.

QUEX.

[*Coolly.*] Well? and what then? You listen to a conversation carried on in an open spot, from which your mischievous ears manage to detach the phrase "to-night." My explanation, if I am called upon to make one, will be absurdly simple.

SOPHY.

[*Derisively.*] Ha, ha! will it! ha, ha, ha! I daresay!

QUEX.

Yes. You see, I promised her Grace that I would send a book to her room to-night—*to-night*. My man had gone to bed; I brought it myself, intending to hand it to Mrs. Watson, her maid. In the meantime, the Duchess had joined Mrs. Eden and I found *you* here.

SOPHY.

You couldn't tell such an abominable lie!

QUEX.

[*Imperturbably.*] I found *you* here. And then—what is the obvious sequel to the story? [*Shrugging his shoulders.*] I'm a wicked man, Sophy, and you're an undeniably pretty girl—and the devil dared me.

SOPHY.

Oh——!

QUEX.

[*Taking up the bottle of champagne.*] And an excellent banquet you had chanced to provide for the occasion. [*Reading the label.*] "Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or." It will appear, I am afraid, that you had been preparing for the entertainment of some amorous footman.

SOPHY.

[*Snapping her fingers at him.*] Puh! bah! Oh, the whole house shall know that that is your Duchess's champagne.

QUEX.

Excuse me—Mr. Brewster, the butler, will disprove that tale. You wheedled this out of him on your own account, remember.

SOPHY.

[*Disconcerted.*] Oh—ah, yes—but——

QUEX.

For yourself, my dear Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*Falteringly.*] Yes, but—she made me do it.

QUEX.

She made you do it! [*Replacing the bottle, sternly.*] And who, pray, will accept your word, upon this or any other point, against that of a lady of the position of the Duchess of Strood?

[*He walks away from her and examines the books upon the writing-table. She sits on the settee, a blank expression upon her face.*]

SOPHY.

[*After a little consideration, wiping her brow with the back of her hand.*] At any rate, my darling—Miss Muriel —would quickly see through a horrid trick of this sort.

QUEX.

I bet you a dozen boxes of gloves to a case of your manicure instruments that she doesn't.

SOPHY.

I said to her to-day, at my place, that I was certain, if I could meet you alone in some quiet spot I could get a kiss out of you.

QUEX.

[*Under his breath, glaring at her.*] You——! [*Coolly.*] Oh, now I understand. Yes, my dear, but Miss Eden is scarcely likely to believe that a modest girl would carry her devotion to this extent. Good heavens! why your attire——! [*She pulls her robe about her sharply.*] And a woman who compromises herself, recollect, is never measured by her own character, always by her companion's.

[*She starts to her feet and paces the room, uttering cries of anger and indignation. He continues to interest himself in the books.*]

SOPHY.

Oh! no, no! my darling wouldn't think it of me! when I've abused you so continually! she surely couldn't! oh! oh! [*With flashing eyes.*] Now, look here, my lord! you don't really imagine that I'm going to stick in this room with you patiently all through the night, do you?

QUEX.

How do you propose to avoid it?

SOPHY.

[*Pointing to the passage-door.*] As true as I'm alive, if you don't unlock that door, I—I—I'll scream the place down!

QUEX.

Why scream? [*Pointing to the bell-rope which hangs beside the door.*] There's the bell. I daresay a servant or two are still up and about. You'd rouse the house quicker in that way.

SOPHY.

Much obliged to you for the hint. I will—I will—— [*She goes to the bell-rope and grasps it; then she looks round and sees him calmly turning the leaves of a book he has selected. She stares at him, with sudden misgiving.*] Ha, now we shall see how much your grand scheme amounts to!

QUEX.

We shall. Ring the bell.

SOPHY.

[*Blankly.*] What do you mean?

QUEX.

Pooh, my dear! ring, ring, ring! or yell! You won't be the first semi-circumspect young person who has got herself into a scrape and then endeavored to save herself by raising a hullabaloo.

[*She slowly takes her hand from the bell-rope and moves a step or two toward him.*]

SOPHY.

Oh, that's what you'd try to make out, is it? [*He raises his eyes from his book and gives her a significant look. Leaning upon the arm of the settee, she says faintly:*] You—you——!

QUEX.

Yes, I tell you again, my dear, you have got yourself into a shocking mess. You've got *me* into a mess, and you've got yourself in a mess.

SOPHY.

[*Pulling herself up and advancing to him till she faces him.*] You—you are an awful blackguard, my lord.

QUEX.

Thank you, my dear. But you're not far wrong—I was a blackguard till I met Miss Eden; and now, losing Miss Eden, perhaps I'm going to be a bigger blackguard than before. At the same time, you know, there's not much to choose between us; for you're a low spy, an impudent, bare-faced liar, a common kitchen-cat who wriggles into the best rooms, gets herself fondled, and then spits. [*Passing her and throwing himself, full-length, upon the settee and settling himself to read.*] Therefore I've no compunction in making you pay your share of this score, my dear Sophy—none whatever.

[*She walks feebly to the passage-door and stands rattling the handle in an uncertain way. At last she breaks down and cries a little.*]

SOPHY.

Oh! oh! oh! let me go, my lord. [*He makes no response.*] Do let me go—please! will you? [*Approaching him and wiping her eyes upon the sleeve of her night-dress.*] I hope your lordship will kindly let me go.

QUEX.

[*Shortly.*] No.

SOPHY.

[*Steadying herself.*] I don't want to rouse the house at this time o' night if I can help it——

QUEX.

Don't you?

SOPHY.

Though I am certain I can make my story good anyway. But I'd rather your lordship let me out without the bother—[*Piteously.*] Do! [*He turns a leaf of his book. She speaks defiantly.*] Very well! very well! here I sit then! [*Seating herself.*] We'll see who tires first, you or I! you or I! [*Again snapping her fingers at him.*] Bah! you horror! you—horror!

QUEX.

[*Raising himself on his elbow.*] Will you have this sofa? [*She gives him a fierce look.*] A glass of your wine?

[*She rises, with a stamp of the foot, and once more paces the room. He sips his wine and resettles himself. She goes distractedly from one object to another, now leaning upon a chair, then against the pillar of the cheval-glass. Ultimately she comes to the bell-rope and fingers it again irresolutely.*]

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] My lord——! [*He remains silent. She releases the bell-rope.*] Oh—h—h! [*She pauses by the settee, looking down upon him as though she would strike him; then she walks away, and, seating herself in the chair by the bedside, drops her head upon the bed. The clock tinkles the half-hour. There is a short silence. Suddenly she rises, uttering a sharp cry, with her hand to her heart.*] Oh! [*panting*] oh! oh!

QUEX.

[*Looking at her.*] What now?

SOPHY.

Valma!

QUEX.

Valma?

SOPHY.

Mr. Valma! oh, you know he is in the house!

QUEX.

He! what's he doing here?

SOPHY.

The housekeeper gave him permission to sleep here. You know! [*Stamping her foot.*] Don't you know?

QUEX.

[*Sitting up, alertly.*] Ho! my jealous friend, the palmist. *He* is on the premises, hey?

SOPHY.

[*Distractedly.*] Let me out! oh, yes, he *is* jealous of me; he *is* jealous of me, and we've had a few words about you as it is——

QUEX.

Ah!

SOPHY.

Oh, this would ruin me with Valma! oh, if your lordship hasn't any feeling for me, don't let Valma think that I'm a—that I'm——! [*Going down on her knees before him.*] Oh, I won't tell on you! I promise I won't, if you'll only let me go! I will hold my tongue about you and the Duchess! I take my solemn oath I'll hold my tongue!

QUEX.

[*Rising.*] Ha! [*Calmly.*] No, my dear Sophy, I wasn't aware that your *fiancé* is in the house. So the situation comes home to you a little more poignantly now, does it?

SOPHY.

[*Rising and going to the passage-door.*] Unlock the door! where's the key?

QUEX.

Wait, wait, wait! And you're going to keep your mouth shut after all, are you?

SOPHY.

[*Rattling the door-handle.*] Yes, yes. Unlock it!

QUEX.

Don't be in such a hurry.

SOPHY.

I give you my sacred word——

QUEX.

[*Thoughtfully.*] Tsch, tsch, tsch! [*Sharply, with a snap of the fingers.*] Yes—by Jove—! [*Pointing to the chair by the writing-table.*] Sit down. [*Imperatively.*] Sit down. [*She sits, wonderingly. He goes to the table, selects a plain sheet of paper and lays it before her. Then he hands her a pen.*] Write as I tell you.

SOPHY.

[*Tremblingly.*] What?

QUEX.

[*Pointing to the ink.*] [*Dictating.*] "My lord." [*She writes; he walks about as he dictates.*] "My lord. I am truly obliged to you——"

SOPHY.

Yes.

QUEX.

"For your great liberality——"

SOPHY

[*Turning.*] Eh?

QUEX.

[*Sternly.*] Go on. [*She writes.*] "For your great liberality, and in once more availing myself of it I quite understand——"

SOPHY.

[*Weakly.*] Oh! [*After writing.*] Yes.

QUEX.

"I quite understand that our friendship comes to an end." [*She rises and faces him.*] Go on.

SOPHY.

Our friendship!

QUEX.

Yes.

SOPHY.

Our—*friendship!*

QUEX.

Yes.

SOPHY.

I won't.

QUEX.

Very well.

SOPHY.

How dare you try to make me write such a thing! [*He turns from her and, book in hand, resumes his recumbent position on the sofa. She approaches him, falteringly.*] What would you do with that, if I did write it?

QUEX.

Simply hold it in my possession, as security for your silence, until after my marriage with Miss Eden; then return it to you.

SOPHY.

Oh, won't your lordship trust me?

QUEX.

[*Contemptuously.*] Trust you! [*After a pause, she returns to the writing-table and takes up her pen again.*] Where were we?

SOPHY.

[*Feebly.*] "I quite understand——"

QUEX.

"That our friendship comes to an end." [*She writes. He rises and looks over her shoulder.*] "While thanking you again for past and present favors——"

SOPHY.

[*Groaning as she writes.*] Oh! oh!

QUEX.

"I undertake not to approach or annoy you in the future——"

SOPHY.

Oh!

QUEX.

"Upon any pretext whatsoever. Yours respectfully——" [*After watching the completion of the letter.*] Date it vaguely—[*with a wave of the hand*] "Monday afternoon." Blot it. [*Moving away.*] That's right. [*She rises, reading the letter with staring eyes. Then she comes to him and yields the letter, and he folds it neatly and puts it into his breast-pocket.*] Thank you. I think I need detain you no longer.

SOPHY.

[*With a gasp.*] Ah! stop a bit! no, I won't!

QUEX.

What's the matter with you?

SOPHY.

[*Wildly.*] Why, it's like selling Muriel! Just to get myself out of this, I'm simply handing her over to you! I won't do it! I won't! [*She rushes to the bell-rope, and tugs at it again and again.*] She sha'n't marry you! she sha'n't! I've said she sha'n't, and she sha'n't! [*Leaving the bell-rope and facing him fiercely.*] Oh, let your precious Duchess go scot free! After all, what does it matter who the woman is you've been sporting with, so that Miss Muriel is kept from falling into your clutches! Yes, I'll make short work of *you,* my lord. The ladies shall hear from *my* mouth of the lively half-hour I've spent with you, and how I've suddenly funked the consequences and *raised a hullabaloo!* Now, my lord! now then! now then!

[*His astonishment has given way to admiration; he gazes at her as if spell-bound.*]

QUEX.

[*After a pause, during which she stands before him panting.*] By God, you're a fine plucked 'un! I've never known a better. [*Resolutely.*] No, my girl, I'm damned if you shall suffer! Quick! listen! pull yourself together!

SOPHY.

[*Hysterically.*] Eh? eh?

QUEX.

[*Taking her letter from his pocket and thrusting it into her hand.*] Here's your letter! take it—I won't have it. [*Going quickly to the passage-door, unlocking it, and throwing the door open.*] There you are!

SOPHY.

[*Sobbing.*] Oh! oh!

[*There is a hurried, irregular knocking at the door.*]

QUEX.

[*Gripping her arm.*] Hush! [*In a whisper.*] Call out—wait!

SOPHY.

[*Raising her voice—unsteadily.*] Wait—one moment!

QUEX.

[*In her ear, as he gives her the key of the door.*] Say the Duchess is with Mrs. Jack; say she wants her letters brought to her in the morning! say anything——

SOPHY.

Yes, yes. [*Weeping and shaking and gasping, she goes to the door and unlocks it. He tip-toes into the bedroom and turns out the light there. She opens the door an inch or two.*] Yes?

TWO VOICES.

[*A man's and a woman's.*] What is it? what's the matter?

SOPHY.

[*Steadying herself, with an effort.*] Nothing. Only her Grace has gone to Mrs. Eden's room and wishes her letters taken there in the morning most particularly—see?

THE VOICES.

What did you ring like that for? Thought the place was afire!

SOPHY.

Oh, don't make a fuss about nothing. You servants *are* an old-fashioned lot. Bong swor!

THE VOICES.

[*Angrily.*] Oh, good-night.

SOPHY.

Ha, ha, ha!

[*She closes the door and totters away from it, sobbing hysterically, as* QUEX *comes to her.*]

QUEX.

[*Kindly.*] Be off. Go to bed. Serve me how you please. Miss Fullgarney, upon my soul, I—I humbly beg your pardon.

SOPHY

[*Passing him.*] Oh! oh! oh! [*Turning to him.*] Oh, God bless you! You—you—you're a gentleman! I'll do what I can for you!

[*She staggers to the passage-door and disappears, closing the door behind her. Then he extinguishes the remaining light, and cautiously lets himself out at the other door.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene is the same, in every respect, as that of the First Act.

[*On the right* MISS CLARIDGE *is manicuring a young gentleman. On the left* MISS MOON *is putting her manicure-table in order, as if she had recently disposed of a customer.* MISS LIMBIRD *is again at her desk, busy over accounts. The door-gong sounds and, after a short interval,* QUEX *and* FRAYNE *enter, preceded by* MISS HUDDLE. FRAYNE *appears particularly depressed and unwell.*]

QUEX.

[*Nodding to* MISS LIMBIRD.] Good-morning.

MISS LIMBIRD.

Morning.

QUEX.

[*To* MISS HUDDLE.] Miss Fullgarney has not yet arrived, you say?

MISS HUDDLE.

Not yet.

QUEX.

[*Looking at his watch.*] Twenty minutes to twelve.

MISS MOON.

Yes, we've never known Miss Fullgarney to be so late at her business. I do hope she hasn't been run over and injured.

MISS HUDDLE.

Or murdered by tramps.

QUEX.

My dear young lady!

MISS MOON.

Well, one does read *such* things in the ha'penny papers.

MISS HUDDLE.

And she went down to Richmond yesterday afternoon, you know—to Fauncey Court.

QUEX.

Of course I know—and slept there.

MISS MOON.

Oh, did she?

QUEX.

And has come up to town this morning.

MISS HUDDLE.

Then she'll have gone home, I expect, to change.

MISS MOON.

That's what she's done. [*Slightly disappointed.*] Well, I *should* have been sorry if anything had happened to her.

QUEX.

Naturally.

MISS HUDDLE.

So should I, though I'm quite new here.

MISS MOON.

It never gives *me* any pleasure to hear of people having their limbs crushed.

MISS HUDDLE.

Or being murdered by tramps.

MISS MOON.

Won't your lordship take a chair? [*To* FRAYNE, *who has wandered down to the window.*] And you, sir?

[*The young gentleman, his manicuring being finished, has risen, paid* MISS LIMBIRD *and departed, followed by* MISS CLARIDGE *carrying her bowl and towel. The door-gong sounds.*]

QUEX.

Is that she?

MISS MOON.

No; that young gentleman leaving.

[MISS MOON, *carrying her bowl and towel, and* MISS HUDDLE, *after exchanging a few words with* MISS LIMBIRD, *withdraw.*]

FRAYNE.

[*To* QUEX, *biliously.*] How revoltingly hideous these gals look this morning!

QUEX.

Same as yesterday. You're seedy.

FRAYNE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] Oh, shockingly seedy. [*Sitting.*] I'm in for a go of malaria, I fear.

QUEX.

Shame of me to have routed you out of bed and bothered you with my affairs. [*Sitting.*] But you can quite understand, Chick, how confoundedly anxious I am as to the attitude Miss Fullgarney will adopt toward me to-day.

FRAYNE.

Quite, quite. Harry——

QUEX.

Yes?

FRAYNE.

What champagne was it we drank last night at Richmond?

QUEX.

[*With some bitterness.*] Ha! "Félix Poubelle, Carte d'Or."

FRAYNE.

[*Shaking his head.*] *I* can't take champagne.

QUEX.

Can't you!

FRAYNE.

I mean I oughtn't to.

QUEX.

Oh. [*Referring to his watch again.*] I've given you a pretty minute account of last night's tragedy, Chick. "I'll do what I can for you"—those were the Fullgarney's words. Good lord, they came at me like a bolt from the blue! Does she intend to act up to them, eh?—that's the question. Surely she'll act up to them, Chick?

FRAYNE.

Have you met the ladies this morning?

QUEX.

Yes—except Muriel, who didn't show at breakfast.

FRAYNE.

How did you find 'em?

QUEX.

Amiability itself; *they* knew nothing. [*Rising and looking down upon* FRAYNE.] You see, Chick, all that Miss

Fullgarney has to do—if she hasn't already done it—is to tell a trifling taradiddle to Muriel concerning the events of last night. Well, in effect, she has promised to do that, hasn't she? [*Impatiently.*] Eh?

FRAYNE.

[*Gloomily.*] Frankly, Harry, I shouldn't be in the least surprised if the jade sold you.

QUEX.

[*His jaw falling.*] You wouldn't?

FRAYNE.

No.

QUEX.

Phew! *I* should. [*Warmly.*] By Jove, I should!

FRAYNE.

I have conceived a great aversion to her—a long, scraggy gal.

QUEX.

[*With enthusiasm.*] As full of courage as a thoroughbred!

FRAYNE.

[*Closing his eyes.*] I can picture her elbows; sharp, pointed elbows—the barbed fence of the spiteful woman.

QUEX.

Pooh! yesterday she was alluring.

FRAYNE.

[*Rising painfully.*] Yesterday——! [*Gravely.*] Harry, do you know there are moments when I feel that I am changing toward the sex; when I fancy I can discern the skeleton, as it were, through the rounded cheek?

QUEX.

You!

FRAYNE.

Yes, this novel sentiment is undoubtedly gaining possession of your old friend—gradually, perhaps, but surely.

QUEX.

[*Regarding him searchingly.*] Excuse me, Chick—did you turn into the Beefsteak when you got back from Richmond last night?

FRAYNE.

For an hour. Oh, a great mistake.

QUEX.

What, a little whiskey on the top of champagne?

FRAYNE.

[*Gazing pathetically at* QUEX *with watery eyes.*] A good deal of champagne underneath a lot of whiskey.

[*The door-gong sounds.*]

QUEX.

Who's this? [*He walks to the entrance, and looks into the further room.*] The Fullgarney.

[*He returns to his former position, as* SOPHY *enters quickly, followed by* MISS CLARIDGE, MISS MOON, *and* MISS HUDDLE. SOPHY—*dressed as at the end of the First Act—is pale, red-eyed, and generally unstrung. She comes to* QUEX, *disconcerted by his presence.*]

SOPHY.

[*Confronting him.*] Oh, good-morning.

QUEX.

May I beg a few moments——?

SOPHY.

Er—certainly. I'll just take off my things——

[*He joins* FRAYNE. *She goes across the room where she is surrounded by her girls.*]

MISS CLARIDGE.

Oh, Miss Fullgarney, how ill you look!

MISS MOON.

You do seem queer!

MISS HUDDLE.

Just as if you were sickening for something.

MISS LIMBIRD.

[*Coming between* MISS CLARIDGE *and* SOPHY.] Quite ghostly!

SOPHY.

I'm all right, girls; I've had a bad night, that's all. [*Giving her umbrella to* MISS CLARIDGE *and her bag to* MISS MOON, *who passes it to* MISS HUDDLE.] Here! hi! take that beastly bag. [*To* MISS LIMBIRD, *who is removing her hat.*] Oh, don't waggle my head, whatever you do! [*To* MISS MOON, *who is pulling at her jacket.*] Tear the thing off. [*Stripping off her gloves, and speaking in a whisper.*] Girls, I don't want to be disturbed for five minutes.

MISS LIMBIRD.

Very well, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*Glancing at* QUEX *and* FRAYNE, *who are now looking out of the window, with their backs toward her.*] If Miss Eden should happen to turn up before I'm free, just mention who I'm engaged with, will you?

MISS MOON.

Yes, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

That'll do. [*With sudden fierceness.*] What are you all staring at? Haven't any of *you* ever slept in a strange bed?

[*The girls retreat hastily, each carrying an article belonging to* SOPHY.]

QUEX.

[*Advancing a step or two.*] I am exceedingly sorry to see you looking so fatigued.

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] Didn't close my eyes the whole night. [*She drops the portière over the entrance, and approaches* QUEX.] Well, my lord?

QUEX.

I have ventured to call upon you, Miss Fullgarney, in the hope of ratifying the excellent understanding with which we parted last night.

SOPHY.

[*Pointing to* FRAYNE.] Well, but—er——

QUEX.

Oh—oh, yes——[*To* FRAYNE, *who has turned away.*] Frayne——[*To* SOPHY.] I have taken my old and trusted friend, Sir Chichester Frayne, into my confidence in this regrettable business.

SOPHY.

[*Dubiously.*] Indeed?

QUEX.

I thought it desirable there should be a third party——

SOPHY.

P'r'aps you're right. [*Cuttingly.*] One needs a third party when one has the honour of meeting your lordship—[*checking herself.*] Excuse me.

QUEX.

[*Pleasantly, with a slight bow of acknowledgment.*] Before we go further, I may tell you that her Grace has informed me of what passed between you this morning.

SOPHY.

Nothing passed.

QUEX.

Precisely.

SOPHY.

The lady beamed upon me, for all the world as if she was an angel spending a Saturday-to-Monday here below; and I dressed her hair for her just as if I didn't want to tear it out by the roots. And then she turned up her eyes and said she hoped every happiness would attend me, and went downstairs to prayers.

QUEX.

Will you allow me to—to thank you?

SOPHY.

[*Frigidly.*] You needn't. [*Abruptly.*] Oh, by-the-by, the lady gave me a—a keepsake, she called it. [*Endeavouring to extract some bulky object from her pocket.*] I mean to burn the thing, once I've found out what's inside it. But I can't get it open. Here it is.

[*She exhibits the little box, covered with brocade, which* QUEX *has returned to the* DUCHESS *in the previous Act.*]

QUEX.

[*Surprised.*] By Jove!

SOPHY.

[*Simply.*] Eh?

QUEX.

Er—I was wondering what she can have put in that little box.

SOPHY.

Yes, *I wonder.* [*Pulling at the lid.*] It's locked.

QUEX.

I fancy it has one of those Bramah locks which snap. I may have a key——[*He produces his key-ring and, promptly selecting a key, unlocks the box.*] Fortunate coincidence.

[*She opens the box and takes out the first thing that presents itself—the blue silk garter with the diamond buckle.*]

SOPHY.

[*Scandalized.*] Oh, my gracious! I *beg* your pardon.

[*She leaves him hurriedly and hides the box in the cabinet.*]

QUEX.

[*Quietly to* FRAYNE.] Chick, she has passed the souvenirs on to Miss Fullgarney!

FRAYNE.

[*Bitterly.*] How like a woman!

QUEX.

Some women.

FRAYNE.

[*In disgust.*] Pah!

QUEX.

Yesterday she was alluring.

FRAYNE

[*Waving the past from him.*] Yesterday—[*with a slight hiccup*] hic! [*Turning away apologetically.*] The heat in this room——

[*He walks away, as* SOPHY *returns to* QUEX.]

QUEX.

[*To* SOPHY.] Well, I must not detain you longer, Miss Fullgarney. But there is, of course, one point upon which I should like to feel completely assured. You have seen Miss Eden——?

SOPHY.

No; not since last evening.

QUEX.

[*Anxiously.*] When do you——?

SOPHY.

[*Looking away.*] I'm rather expecting her to pop in here during the day.

QUEX.

Quite so. And—and then——?

SOPHY.

[*Facing him candidly.*] Your lordship told me last night that your little visit to the Duchess was a perfectly innocent one?

QUEX.

Absolutely innocent. [*Hesitatingly.*] I fear I cannot go further than that.

FRAYNE.

[*Fanning himself with his handkerchief.*] By gad, why not, Harry? We are in Miss Fullgarney's hands. [*To* SOPHY.] His lordship went to her Grace's apartment solely

to return some gifts which he had accepted from her in the—ah—dim, distant past, and to say adieu.

SOPHY.

[*Witheringly.*] Ah, I knew *she* was a double-faced thing [*looking at* QUEX *relentingly*]; but p'r'aps one *has* been a little down on *you.*

QUEX.

[*Meekly.*] You have it in your power to atone for that amply.

SOPHY

[*Half feelingly, half sullenly.*] At any rate, you behaved, in the end, like a gentleman to me last night. And so—when I see Miss Muriel——

QUEX.

Yes?

SOPHY.

[*Deliberately.*] I am going to tell her a lie.

QUEX.

[*With some emotion.*] Miss Fullgarney, I—I——

SOPHY.

Oh, I said I'd do what I can for you. [*Uncomfortably.*] And this is all I *can* do.

QUEX.

[*Light-heartedly.*] All!

SOPHY.

Just to give you a chance.

QUEX.

Chance! [*Drawing a deep breath.*] You place my happiness beyond danger.

SOPHY.

[*Impulsively, offering him her hand.*] I wish you luck, my lord. [*He takes her hand and wrings it.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Who has opened the window for air.*] Hallo!

SOPHY.

[*Turning nervously.*] What——?

FRAYNE.

[*Looking out.*] Isn't this your friend, Captain Bastling?

QUEX.

Bastling?

FRAYNE.

At that window?

[FRAYNE *moves away to the circular table and sniffs at a bottle of scent.* QUEX *goes to the window.*]

QUEX.

[*Looking out.*] Yes. What's old Napier up to there?

SOPHY.

[*Guiltily.*] I—I heard Captain Bastling mention that he was thinking of having his hand read by Mr. Valma some time or other.

QUEX.

No! ha, ha, ha! [*Leaving the window.*] He doesn't see me; I won't disturb him. [*To* SOPHY, *jocularly.*] A convenient arrangement—it is possible to transfer one's self from the manicurist to the palmist without the trouble of putting on one's gloves.

SOPHY.

Ha, ha! y—yes.

QUEX.

[*Pausing on his way to the entrance.*] Miss Fullgarney, may I ask if you and Mr. Valma have fixed upon the date of your marriage?

SOPHY.

Oh, we sha'n't get married yet awhile—not for a year or more, I fancy.

QUEX.

[*Graciously.*] In that case, I shall hope to have the pleasure, and the privilege, of being present at your wedding—with my wife.

SOPHY.

[*Hanging her head.*] Thank you.

QUEX.

Chick—— [*He goes out.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Turning to* SOPHY *with dignity.*] Miss Fullgarney, one thing I desire to say. It is that your behaviour this morning completely obliterates—the——

[*He is cut short by another hiccup and, with a bow, withdraws.* POLLITT *appears at the window.* SOPHY *goes to the entrance, and watches the departure of* QUEX *and* FRAYNE. POLLITT *enters the room. The door-gong sounds.*]

POLLITT.

Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*Turning.*] Oh! Valma, dear?

POLLITT.

[*With a heavy brow.*] Captain Bastling is waiting at my place, for Miss Eden.

SOPHY.

[*Subdued.*] Is he?

POLLITT.

Dearest, during my brief but, I pride myself, honourable association with palmistry, this is the first time my rooms have been used for this sort of game.

SOPHY.

This sort of game?

POLLITT.

Other Professors have stooped to it, but I—oh, no, it is playing palmistry a little bit too low down.

SOPHY.

[*Unhappily.*] Surely it's quite harmless, love—a couple of young people meeting to say good-by.

POLLITT.

From what you've told me, I greatly doubt that it *will* be good-by.

SOPHY.

D—d—do you?

POLLITT.

[*Hotly.*] Anyhow I resent *your* being the go-between of this gallant captain and a girl betrothed to another man—you who are naturally such a thorough lady!

SOPHY.

Oh—oh, Valma——!

[*She drops her head upon his shoulder and whimpers.*]

POLLITT.

Dearest, what have I said?

SOPHY.

Valma, I've made up my mind. I intend to do exactly what you wish, in the future, in everything. I'm going to give up squatting down here manicuring gentlemen——

POLLITT.

Sophy!

SOPHY.

And shall simply sail about these rooms, overlooking my girls in the plainest of silks. And never again will I interfere in an underhand way in other people's affairs on any account whatever. [*Putting her arms round his neck.*] Yes, you *shall* find me a lady—a lady——

POLLITT.

[*Tenderly.*] Ah——! [*The door-gong sounds. She raises her head and dries her eyes hurriedly.*] Is that Miss Eden?

[*He crosses to the window as she goes to the entrance.* MISS LIMBIRD *appears.*]

MISS LIMBIRD.

[*To* SOPHY.] Here's Miss Eden.

SOPHY.

[*With a nod.*] Give me half a minute with her; then I'm at liberty. [MISS LIMBIRD *disappears.* SOPHY *comes to* POLLITT.] I'll send Muriel across directly.

[*He departs.* MISS LIMBIRD *returns and, holding the portière aside, admits* MURIEL. MURIEL *is wearing a veil.* MISS LIMBIRD *withdraws.* SOPHY *meets* MURIEL; *they kiss each other undemonstratively.*]

SOPHY.

[*Constrainedly.*] Well, darling?

MURIEL.

[*In the same way.*] Well, Sophy?

SOPHY.

You're here then?

MURIEL.

As you see.

SOPHY.

Any difficulty?

MURIEL.

[*In a hard voice.*] No. The Duchess and Mrs. Jack were coming to town shopping, and Lady Owbridge proposed that she and I should tack ourselves on to them.

SOPHY.

How have you got rid of them?

MURIEL.

Spoken the truth, for once—my head really does throb terribly. They think I've run in here to sit quietly with you while they—[*Suddenly.*] Oh, be quick, Sophy!

SOPHY.

Quick, dear?

MURIEL.

Why don't you tell me?

SOPHY.

Tell you——?

MURIEL.

About last night—this woman——

SOPHY.

Her Grace?

MURIEL.

Yes, yes.

SOPHY.

Oh, why, I haven't anything to tell, darling.

MURIEL.

Haven't anything to——?

SOPHY.

You see, I couldn't help remembering what you'd called me—mean, and despicable, and all the rest of it; and the feeling came over me that you were right, that I had been sneaky. And so, after I'd attended to her Grace, I—I went straight to bed.

MURIEL.

[*Sitting.*] Oh, yes. Then you didn't attempt to—to watch?

SOPHY.

No.

MURIEL.

[*Faintly.*] Oh!

SOPHY.

Aren't you glad?

MURIEL.

Glad!

SOPHY.

Why, you were certain that the word or two I'd overheard meant nothing wrong.

MURIEL.

I said so.

SOPHY.

Said so!

MURIEL.

[*Turning to her with clenched hands.*] Yes, but at the same time you put the dreadful idea into my head, Sophy, and I've not been able to dismiss it for one moment since.

SOPHY.

[*Under her breath.*] Oh! [*Sitting.*]

MURIEL.

[*Lifting her veil.*] There! you can see what I've been going through.

SOPHY.

[*Looking at her.*] I'm so sorry.

MURIEL.

[*Looking at* SOPHY.] *You* look rather washed out too. Haven't you slept, either?

SOPHY.

[*Turning her head away.*] Not over well. [*Falteringly.*] Then, after all, it would have been better if I *had* spied on her?

MURIEL.

Anything—even that—would have been preferable to this uncertainty.

SOPHY.

[*To herself, her jaw falling.*] Oh——!

MURIEL.

[*Looking toward the window.*] Has *he* arrived?

SOPHY.

Yes. [MURIEL *rises, then* SOPHY.]

MURIEL.

[*Producing, from her pocket, a jeweller's case and showing it to* SOPHY.] Do you like this? I've just bought it, over the way, at Gressier's.

SOPHY.

For Captain Bastling?

MURIEL.

[*With a nod, opening the box.*] A solitaire shirt-stud.

[*She retains a neatly-folded piece of paper which is enclosed in the box and hands the box to* SOPHY.]

SOPHY.

Beautiful. [*Glancing at the piece of paper in* MURIEL'S *hand.*] What's that?

MURIEL.

[*Unfolding the paper carefully.*] This goes with it.

[*She holds the paper before* SOPHY.]

SOPHY.

[*Reading.*] "To Napier——"

MURIEL.

[*Withdrawing the paper.*] Ah, no.

SOPHY.

Mayn't I?

MURIEL.

[*Yielding the paper impulsively.*] Yes, *you* may.

[MURIEL *turns away and stands leaning upon the back of the screen-chair, with her face in her hands.* SOPHY *places the jeweller's case upon the circular table.*]

SOPHY.

[*Reading with difficulty.*] "To Napier from Muriel. I only——" what? You *have* blotted it.

MURIEL.

[*With a sob.*] Have I?

SOPHY.

You've been crying over it.

MURIEL.

Yes.

SOPHY.

"I only——" I can't read it.

MURIEL.

[*Through her tears.*]

"I only know—we loved in vain:
I only feel—Farewell!—Farewell!"

SOPHY.

[*In a low voice.*] Very nice, darling. [*She lays the paper tenderly upon the box and goes to* MURIEL. *Eyeing her keenly.*] You really *are* determined, then, to wish him good-by?

MURIEL.

[*Turning to her and weeping upon her shoulder.*] Oh, Sophy! Sophy!

SOPHY.

There, there! it'll soon be over.

MURIEL.

[*Raising her head.*] Over! yes, yes! over!

SOPHY.

And—p'r'aps it's all for the best, you know.

MURIEL.

For the best!

SOPHY.

What I mean is, that very likely we've both of us been a little cruel to poor Lord Quex—hard on him——

MURIEL.

[*Indignantly.*] *You* say this to me! [*Distractedly.*] *You* say this, after having poisoned my mind and given

me an awful night of sleeplessness and doubt. Yesterday I was as firm as a rock; to-day I'm as weak as water again. [*Facing* SOPHY *with flashing eyes.*] Ah, I tell you honestly you'd better not let me meet Captain Bastling this morning! you'd better not let me see him!

[*The door-gong sounds.* BASTLING *appears at the window, and looks into the room.*]

SOPHY.

[*Whose back is toward the window, soothingly.*] No, no, you sha'n't go across to Valma's while you're like this. I'll make an excuse for you to Captain Bastling——

BASTLING.

[*At the window.*] Muriel

MURIEL.

[*Passing* SOPHY *swiftly.*] Napier!

SOPHY.

[*Holding her arm.*] Darling——

MURIEL.

[*Freeing herself.*] Release me, Sophy! release me! ah——!

[*She joins* BASTLING *and they disappear. As* SOPHY *goes to the window and looks out after them,* QUEX *enters, followed by* FRAYNE.]

QUEX.

[*Glancing round the room.*] Miss Fullgarney——

SOPHY.

[*Turning sharply.*] Hey? [*Blankly.*] Oh—my lord——!

QUEX.

I am compelled to intrude upon you again. I have just met Lady Owbridge, with her Grace and Mrs. Eden in Sackville Street. My aunt sends me with a message to Miss Eden.

SOPHY.

[*Confused.*] M—m—Miss Eden?

QUEX.

Mrs. Eden has proposed a lunch at Prince's, provided that Miss Eden feels equal to——[*Looking about him again.*] Where is Miss Eden?

SOPHY.

Where?

QUEX.

She is here—with you.

SOPHY.

N—no.

QUEX.

No?

SOPHY.

[*With a gulp.*] *I* haven't seen anything of her.

QUEX.

[*In an altered tone.*] Really?

SOPHY.

No.

QUEX.

[*Calmly.*] Strange.

[*He walks away and joins* FRAYNE. SOPHY *stealthily closes and fastens the window.*]

QUEX.

[*In a low voice, to* FRAYNE.] Chick——

FRAYNE.

Eh?

QUEX.

Miss Eden *is* here. Why is the Fullgarney telling me this falsehood?

FRAYNE.

You will remember I was positive she would sell you before she'd done with you.

QUEX.

[*Gripping* FRAYNE'S *arm.*] Don't! [*Advancing to* SOPHY—*politely.*] I understood from my aunt, Miss Fullgarney, that her ladyship left Miss Eden at Gressier's, the jeweller's, less than half an hour ago.

SOPHY.

[*Fussing with the objects upon the cabinet and the manicure table.*] Oh?

QUEX.

Miss Eden had some little commission to discharge at Gressier's, and intended coming across to you immediately afterward.

SOPHY.

[*Quickly.*] Ah, then she hasn't finished her business at Gressier's yet.

QUEX.

Yes, because I looked in at the shop on my way here.

SOPHY.

Funny. I can't imagine where she's taken herself to.

QUEX.

[*Earnestly.*] Miss Fullgarney—

SOPHY.

My lord?

QUEX.

I thought we had become good friends, you and I——?

SOPHY.

So we have, I hope.

QUEX.

And that you were desirous of rendering me a service?

SOPHY.

Well, aren't I, my lord?

QUEX.

Are you? You *know* that Miss Eden came to you directly she left Gressier's. You *know* she did.

SOPHY.

[*After a pause—drawing a deep breath*] Yes, I—I own it.

QUEX.

[*Reproachfully.*] Ah, Miss Fullgarney!

SOPHY.

She *has* been in, and I *have* done you the service I promised.

QUEX.

[*Calmly.*] You have?

SOPHY.

Indeed I have, as true as I stand here. [*Steadying herself.*] But the fact is—the fact is Miss Eden had a purchase

to make that she didn't wish the ladies to interfere over, and—and she has run out for ten minutes. If your lordship must know where she is, she's in the Burlington.

QUEX.

[*Very quietly.*] Oh, she has run out for a few minutes?

SOPHY.

She might be a quarter of an hour.

QUEX.

Not *run* out; *flown* out, at one of these windows.

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] One of these windows?

QUEX.

[*Pointing to the entrance.*] She has not gone out by the door.

SOPHY.

What do you mean?

QUEX.

Your young ladies assured me just now that Miss Eden was in this room with you. [FRAYNE, *possessed of an idea, has gone to the door in the partition. He now raps at the door gently.*] No, no, Chick—please! we are not policemen.

FRAYNE.

[*Opening the door a few inches.*] Miss Eden, I regret to learn you are suffering from headache.

SOPHY.

[*Indignantly.*] Well, of all the liberties——!

QUEX.

[*Angrily.*] Frayne!

FRAYNE.

May I tell you of an unfailing remedy——? [*He peeps into the private room, then withdraws his head, and says to* QUEX:] No.

SOPHY.

[*Flouncing up to* FRAYNE, *and speaking volubly and violently.*] Now, look here, sir, I'm a busy woman—as busy and as hard-working a woman as any in London. Because you see things a bit slack Ascot week, it doesn't follow that my books, and a hundred little matters, don't want attending to. [*Sitting at the desk and opening and closing the books noisily.*] And I'm certainly not going to have gentlemen, whoever they may be, marching into my place, and taking possession of it, and doubting my word, and opening and shutting doors, exactly as if they were staying in a common hotel. I'd have you to know that my establishment isn't conducted on *that* principle.

[QUEX *has been standing, with compressed lips and a frown upon his face, leaning upon the back of the chair near the circular table. During* SOPHY'S *harangue his eyes fall upon the jeweller's case and the scrap of paper lying open upon it. He stares at the writing for a moment, then comes to the table and picks up both the case and the paper.*]

FRAYNE.

[*To* SOPHY, *while this is going on.*] My good lady, a little candor on your part——

SOPHY.

I don't understand what you're hinting at by "a little candor." You've already been told where Miss Eden is, and anybody who knows me knows that if I say a thing——

FRAYNE.

But when your young ladies declare——

SOPHY.

I'm really not responsible for the sayings and doings of a parcel of stupid girls. If they didn't see Miss Eden go out they were asleep, and if they weren't asleep they're blind; and as I've explained till I'm hoarse, I'm very busy this morning, and I should be extremely obliged to you two gentlemen if you'd kindly go away and call again a little later.

QUEX.

Chick.

FRAYNE.

Eh?

QUEX.

I want you.

[FRAYNE *comes to* QUEX, *who hands him the jeweller's case and the slip of paper.*]

SOPHY.

[*Fussing over her books, oblivious of what is transpiring.*] As if the difficulty of conducting a business of this kind isn't sufficient without extra bothers and worries being brought down on one's head! What with one's enormous rent, and rotten debts, it's heartbreaking! Here's a woman here, on my books, who runs an account for fifteen months, with the face of an angel, and no more intends to pay me than to jump over St. Paul's——

QUEX.

[*Who again has possession of the jeweller's case and the paper.*] Miss Fullgarney——

SOPHY.

What now, my lord? Upon my word, it is *too* bad——!

QUEX.

Please come here.

SOPHY.

[*Coming forward—now on the verge of tears.*] After such a night as I've had, too. I never could do without my full eight hours——

QUEX.

Be silent!

SOPHY.

What!

QUEX.

Miss Eden and Captain Bastling——

SOPHY.

Eh?

QUEX.

They are acquaintances—friends. [*With a stamp of the foot.*] They are on terms of——

SOPHY.

[*Faintly.*] Oh!

QUEX.

[*Pointing to the window.*] She is with him at this moment—there.

SOPHY.

[*Unsteadily.*] Whatever are you saying, my lord? [*Discovering that he has the jeweller's case and the paper.*] Ah——!

QUEX.

Yes, I found these upon the table. [*She advances, to take them from him.*] Miss Eden left them here—forgot them?

SOPHY.

[*In a murmur.*] Yes.

[*He gives them to her. She puts them into her pocket and sits.*]

QUEX.

Come! tell me.

SOPHY.

You—you are not the only one in the field, my lord.

QUEX.

So I conclude.

SOPHY.

Have pity on her!

QUEX.

[*Sternly.*] How dare you!

SOPHY.

It's more my fault than hers.

QUEX.

Continue.

SOPHY.

She has wanted to stop it, hating herself for being deceitful, but I—I've encouraged her, egged her on.

QUEX.

Yes.

SOPHY.

They've been in the habit of meeting here at my place.

QUEX.

[*Again pointing to the window.*] In this fellow's rooms —Mr. Valma's——

SOPHY.

[*Rising.*] No, no. They've never met there, till this morning. But he—young Bastling—he's going away, abroad, in a fortnight or so, and he wished to say good-by to her quietly.

QUEX.

[*Turning toward the window fiercely.*] Ah——!

SOPHY.

[*Laying her hand upon his arm.*] Be careful, my lord!

QUEX.

[*Looking at her.*] Careful?

SOPHY.

[*Significantly.*] I know how she feels to-day. If you *want* to send her to Hong-Kong with Captain Bastling——

[QUEX *hesitates for a moment, then crosses to* FRAYNE, *to whom he speaks apart.*]

QUEX.

Chick! how shall I act?

FRAYNE.

[*Dismally.*] Dear old chap, to be quite honest with you, I was not wholly captivated by Miss Eden when you presented me yesterday.

QUEX.

Tshah! What shall I do? wait?

FRAYNE.

In any event, of course, the man's head has to be punched. But it might be wise to delay doing it until——

QUEX.

[*To* SOPHY.] You spoke, a little while ago, of giving me "a chance." I see now what was in your mind. There's a risk, then, that this good-by may not be final?

SOPHY.

[*Stammeringly.*] W—well, I——

QUEX.

[*Sharply.*] Eh?

SOPHY.

[*Breaking down.*] Oh, my lord, recollect, she's not much more than a girl!

QUEX.

No, she is not much more than a girl; but you—though you and she are of the same age—*you* are a woman. *You* know your world, upstairs and downstairs, boudoir and kitchen. Yet you own you have encouraged her in this, made her clandestine meetings with this penniless beggar possible. You——! you deserve to be whipped, Miss Fullgarney—whipped!

SOPHY.

[*Facing him.*] Come, my lord! not so fast! After all, remember, Captain Bastling may be poor, but he's Miss Eden's match in other ways.

QUEX.

Match?

SOPHY.

Young, and good-looking. Oh, and isn't it natural——?

QUEX.

Quite natural—quite. [*Turning to* FRAYNE.] Chick, what an ass I've been; what fools we old chaps are, all of us! Why, if I had led the life of a saint, it would only be necessary for a man like this Bastling to come along, to knock me out. Good lord, how clear it is, when it's brought home to you in this fashion! It isn't the scamp, the roué, a girl shies at; it's the *old* scamp, the *old* roué. She'll take the young one, the blackguard with a smooth skin and a

bright eye, directly he raises a hand—take him without a murmur, money-hunter though he may be. Take him! by Jove, she leaps into his arms!

FRAYNE.

D'ye mean that Bastling——?

QUEX.

Napier Bastling! [*Breaking into a prolonged peal of laughter.*] Ha, ha, ha, ha! Chick, he's just what *I* was at eight-and-twenty. Ha, ha, ha! what I was—and worse, damn him!—and she loves him.

SOPHY.

[*Who has been listening with wide-open eyes and parted lips.*] It's not true! it isn't true!

QUEX.

[*Turning to her.*] Isn't it! You think so, hey? No, I suppose you haven't experimentalized upon *him;* you haven't spied on him, and tempted him as you tempted me. You have never got *him* into a quiet corner and stuck your impudent face in his. If you had——

SOPHY.

Oh, he wouldn't——!

[FRAYNE *has walked away;* QUEX *now joins him.*]

QUEX.

[*As he goes.*] Wouldn't he! ha, ha, ha! [*To* FRAYNE, *fiercely.*] What the devil am I to do, Chick?

FRAYNE.

Punch his head.

SOPHY.

[*Panting.*] Oh! oh! [BASTLING, *indistinctly seen through the muslin blinds, appears at the window. He raps gently upon the window frame.* SOPHY *glances at the window.*] Eh——? [*Under her breath.*] Oh! [*She goes swiftly to* QUEX *and* FRAYNE, *seizes them by the arms, and pushes them toward the door in the partition, saying agitatedly:*] Wait there! don't come out, or make a noise——

QUEX.

What are you up to now?

SOPHY.

Stay here till I find out what's happened. Oh, I'll do what I can for you!

[*They enter the private room and she closes the door. Then she returns to the window, unfastens it, and retreats.* BASTLING *pushes open the window and comes in.*]

BASTLING

[*Advancing to her excitedly.*] Ah, Sophy! [*Looking round.*] Anyone about?

SOPHY.

[*Pointing to the left.*] All my girls are in there. Where is she?

BASTLING.

Next door. She's sitting down, calming herself—having her cry out.

SOPHY.

Crying!

BASTLING.

She's all right—awfully happy. I told her I'd come and tell you.

SOPHY.

Tell me——!

BASTLING.

It's settled.

SOPHY.

Settled.

BASTLING.

She's mine, Sophy.

SOPHY.

[*With a gasp.*] Yours!

BASTLING.

We're going to be married at once—next week. We shall need your help still. Of course, it must be a secret marriage. She will follow me out by-and-by.

SOPHY.

[*Nodding dully.*] Oh, yes.

BASTLING.

Why, aren't you glad about it? [*Smilingly.*] Don't you congratulate us?

SOPHY.

C—certainly.

BASTLING.

Good. And—[*shaking hands with her*] thanks to *you.* [*Releasing her hand.*] Thanks.

SOPHY.

[*Nerving herself for her task.*] Thanks!

BASTLING.

A million of 'em. What's the matter?

SOPHY.

Oh, nothing.

BASTLING.

Yes, there is. Come, out with it.

SOPHY.

Well—*thanks!* [*Tossing her head.*] There isn't much in thanks.

BASTLING.

[*Puzzled.*] Not much in thanks?

SOPHY.

[*Turning away, pouting.*] *I* think not.

BASTLING.

[*Smiling.*] Oh, I know I owe a tremendous deal to the pretty manicurist, and I don't intend to forget it. Just now I'm rather hard-up [*glancing toward the window*] but I shall be in funds before long——

SOPHY.

[*Turning to him with genuine indignation.*] Oh!

BASTLING.

What do you want, then?

SOPHY.

[*After a moment's hesitation, sidling up to him.*] Not money.

BASTLING.

Not?

SOPHY.

A little more than plain thanks though.

BASTLING.

[*Looking into her eyes, laughing softly.*] Ha, ha, ha!

SOPHY.

[*Slyly.*] Ha, ha, ha!

BASTLING.

Thanks—differently expressed——? [*She plays with the lapel of his coat and giggles. He takes her chin in his hand.*] Ha, ha, ha! Sophy!

SOPHY.

Ha, ha!

[MURIEL *appears at the open window and enters the room noiselessly. Seeing* BASTLING *and* SOPHY *together, she halts in surprise.*]

BASTLING.

[*Whose back is to the window.*] I say—mind, no tales.

SOPHY.

[*Looking at* MURIEL, *steadily over* BASTLING'S *shoulder.*] Likely I'd split on you, isn't it?

BASTLING.

Honor bright?

SOPHY.

Oh, if you've any doubt——

[*He raises her face to his and kisses her upon the lips warmly and lingeringly. She goes back a step or two, still gazing fixedly at* MURIEL.]

BASTLING.

Eh——?

[*Following the direction of her eyes, he turns and encounters* MURIEL. *The three stand for a moment or two without movement.*]

BASTLING.

[*After the pause, speaking in a low voice, his eyes avoiding* MURIEL'S.] Well—ha!—I suppose every man makes a big mistake at least once in his life. I've made mine. At the same time, I—I—[*hurriedly*]—oh, I'll write.

[*With a slight, quick bow to* MURIEL, *he wheels round sharply and goes out.*]

SOPHY.

[*Wiping his kiss from her lips.*] The wretch! the wretch! [*The door-gong sounds.*]

MURIEL.

[*Covering her eyes with her hand and uttering a low moan.*] Oh——!

SOPHY.

[*Hanging her head.*] You see, darling, yesterday at Fauncey Court, I—I tried it on with Lord Quex, and he behaved like a gentleman. So the notion struck me that I'd treat the young man in the same way, just to see what *he* was made of, and—well, I'm glad you came in. You might never have believed me.

MURIEL.

[*In a hard voice.*] The shirt-stud—the stuff I wrote—I left them with you——

SOPHY.

[*Producing them.*] I found them after you'd gone.

[MURIEL *takes the piece of paper and tears it into small pieces.* SOPHY *offers her the jeweller's case.*]

MURIEL.

[*Haughtily.*] Take that back to Gressier's this afternoon, please, and tell them I've changed my mind. Say I'll have a little silver collar for my dog, in its place.

[*She sinks into the screen-chair, with her eyes closed. Slipping the case into her pocket,* SOPHY *tip-toes up to the door in the partition; she opens it and beckons to* QUEX, *who appears with* FRAYNE.]

SOPHY.

[*To* QUEX, *in a whisper.*] Phsst! It's all nicely settled. She's said good-by to him for good. What a fuss you made about nothing!

[*She points to the screen-chair; he approaches* MURIEL. SOPHY *and* FRAYNE *talk together.*]

QUEX.

[*Softly.*] Muriel——

MURIEL.

[*Opening her eyes, startled.*] Quex!

QUEX.

[*Brightly.*] I came up to town this morning with Sir Chichester. We've just met Aunt Julia, and the rest of 'em, in Sackville Street. Mrs. Jack clamors for lunch at Prince's. What do you say?

MURIEL.

[*Passing her hand across her eyes.*] Thanks. It'll be jolly.

QUEX.

[*Gayly.*] Ah!

MURIEL.

[*Laying her hand upon his sleeve.*] Quex——

QUEX.

Eh?

MURIEL.

[*Rising, and speaking in a low, appealing voice.*] Give me your word you have been loyal to me, down to your very thought, since our engagement.

QUEX.

[*Earnestly.*] Muriel, I——

MURIEL.

Hush! [*Giving him her hand.*] I believe you. [*The door-gong sounds.*] And, look here! I haven't been quite fair, or generous, to you, I am afraid. But I am going to be different——

QUEX.

After to-day!

MURIEL.

From this moment. Harry——

QUEX.

Hey?

MURIEL.

I won't keep you till the end of the year. Marry me, and have done with it, directly the season is over, and take me away.

QUEX.

[*Bending over her hand.*] Good heavens——!

[MISS LIMBIRD *holds the portière aside and admits* LADY OWBRIDGE, *the* DUCHESS OF STROOD, *and* MRS. EDEN. MISS LIMBIRD *then returns to her desk.* QUEX *goes to* LADY OWBRIDGE, *takes her arm, and leads her forward.*] Aunt Julia! aunt! my dear Aunt Julia!

[*The* DUCHESS *joins* FRAYNE. MRS. EDEN *comes to* MURIEL *and receives the news of the hastened marriage.* SOPHY *moves away to the window.*]

QUEX.

[*Excitedly, to* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Oh, my dear aunt!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

What ails you, Henry?

QUEX.

Muriel! she—she—she's going to marry me!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

I hope so.

QUEX.

But at the end of the Season! a month hence! a month, a month, a month!

LADY OWBRIDGE.

My dear boy! Heaven prosper your union! Muriel——

MRS. EDEN.

[*To* LADY OWBRIDGE.] Isn't this glorious news, Lady Owbridge? But I always thought it unwise to protract the engagement. You never know *what* may happen, do you? I must tell the dear Duchess——

[*She joins the* DUCHESS *and* FRAYNE, *and chatters to them.*]

LADY OWBRIDGE.

[*To* MURIEL, *in a low voice.*] Muriel, you are right. In this life, if you have anything to pardon, pardon quickly. Slow forgiveness is little better than no forgiveness.

MRS. EDEN.

[*Coming to* QUEX.] Congratulate you.

QUEX.

Thanks.

[LADY OWBRIDGE *moves away, joining the* DUCHESS, *as* MRS. EDEN *returns to* MURIEL.]

MRS. EDEN.

[*Kissing* MURIEL.] You sensible girl!

[FRAYNE *comes to* QUEX.]

FRAYNE.

[*To* QUEX, *mournfully.*] Old chap, this is shockingly sudden.

QUEX.

Ha, ha!

FRAYNE.

However, we must contrive, you and I, to pass one more evening together before the event.

QUEX.

One! many!

FRAYNE.

No, no, I mean a buster, Harry; a regular night of it——

QUEX.

Good lord! go away!

[MRS. EDEN *joins* LADY OWBRIDGE *as* FRAYNE *advances to* MURIEL.]

FRAYNE.

[*Taking* MURIEL'S *hand.*] Dear young lady, you are about to become the wife of one of the best. There are not many of us left; we are a dwindling band, Miss Eden——

[*The* DUCHESS *comes to* QUEX.]

DUCHESS.

[*To* QUEX, *softly.*] Sincere congratulations. [*He bows stiffly.*] At any time, you know, when you return to England——

QUEX.

[*Eyeing her sternly.*] Yes?

DUCHESS.

After your honeymoon——

QUEX.

Yes?

DUCHESS.

Should you feel *ennuyé*——

QUEX.

I!

DUCHESS.

The air at Burwarton never failed to exhilarate you. So pray do not forget——

QUEX.

[*Indignantly.*] Duchess!

DUCHESS.

[*Sweetly.*] That poor dear Strood would be pleased to see you. [FRAYNE *joins* LADY OWBRIDGE *and* MRS. EDEN *as the* DUCHESS *advances to* MURIEL.] Dear Miss Eden, may your married life be as beautiful, as serene, as my own!

MURIEL.

[*Frankly.*] Thank you, Duchess.

LADY OWBRIDGE.

We shall be a happy party at luncheon. Shall we go, Duchess? Muriel—Henry——[QUEX *joins* MURIEL. SOPHY *is eyeing* MURIEL *wistfully.* MISS LIMBIRD *holds the portière aside, to allow the visitors to pass out.*] Good morning, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

Good-morning, my lady.

DUCHESS.

Miss Fullgarney——

SOPHY.

Good-by, your Grace.

[*The* DUCHESS *and* LADY OWBRIDGE *go out.*]

FRAYNE.

[*Following them with* MRS. EDEN.] Good-day, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

Good-day, sir.

MRS. EDEN.

Morning, Sophy.

SOPHY.

Morning, Mrs. Eden.

[FRAYNE *and* MRS. EDEN *go out.*]

QUEX

[*Following them with* MURIEL.] Good-morning, Miss Fullgarney.

SOPHY.

[*Blankly.*] G—good-morning, my lord. [QUEX *and* MURIEL *go out, followed by* MISS LIMBIRD. SOPHY *stands aghast, her bosom heaving.*] Oh! oh! oh! [*The door-gong sounds.* POLLITT *appears at the window.* SOPHY *is wringing her hands.*] Oh——!

POLLITT.

[*Entering.*] My love! what's the matter?

SOPHY.

She—she's left me, without a word!

POLLITT.

She?

SOPHY.

Muriel—without so much as wishing me good-morning. [*With a sob.*] Oh! when I've done what I can for everybody!

[*The portière is pulled aside and* MURIEL *returns, unaccompanied, and comes to* SOPHY'S *side swiftly.*]

MURIEL.

[*To* SOPHY.] Forgive me. You did it for the best. [*Kissing her.*] I'm sorry——

SOPHY.

[*Throwing her arms round* MURIEL'S *neck.*] Oh! my darling——! [MURIEL *runs out.* SOPHY *goes to* POLLITT *and drops her head upon his breast, restfully.*] Ah! *that's* all right. [*The door-gong sounds finally.*]

THE END.

IRIS

CRITICAL PREFACE*

Iris is the one play of Pinero's that even his habitual opponents have been constrained to celebrate as an indubitable masterpiece; and the author once hinted to me—though the statement was not made directly—that he regarded *Iris* as one of his major compositions. Mr. William Archer has called it "one of the finest plays of our time"; and I can see no reason to dissent from this opinion.

The fact must be recorded that the career of *Iris* in the theatre was comparatively short; but I think this fact may be explained by asserting frankly that the difficult part of the heroine has never yet been adequately acted. The character of Iris Bellamy calls for an equipment that seems to be beyond the reach of nearly all the actresses that are available in the contemporary theatre. In the original production of this play—at the Garrick Theatre, in London, on September 21st, 1901—the rôle of Iris was "created" by Miss Fay Davis; and in the first American production, which followed shortly afterward, the part was assumed by Miss Virginia Harned. It is not unfair to either of these able actresses to state—after an interval of nearly twenty years—that neither of them rose to the height of the occasion. The character of Iris Bellamy still awaits a satisfactory exponent; and, in the theatre, this play will not come into its own until Pinero's text is delivered to the public by an actress who is able to "contemplate it with a kindred art."

On the other hand, *Iris* is easily the most readable of all Pinero's plays, with the possible exceptions of *Mid-Channel* and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*. It was planned orig-

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inally for projection on the stage; but it endures, without appreciable disadvantage, a transference to the library. Both in subject-matter and in technical treatment, it is more "novelistic" than any other of the later plays of Pinero. If it had not been a drama, it might have been a novel; and the story of *Iris* might have been developed into a very great novel by George Eliot or by George Meredith. It is mainly for this reason that *Iris* seems more "literary" than a fabric frankly fashioned for the theatre, like *The Gay Lord Quex.*

The purpose of *Iris* is to present a picture of the gradual disintegration of a woman of fine tastes and generous incentives, who is destroyed because she lacks sufficient strength to fight successfully against adversity. She is too fine in breeding to accept a regimen of life on terms that are unlovely; but she is not fine enough to rise superior to the assaults of an unpredicted poverty. Iris is, of course, a social parasite,—a sort of orchid of a woman who requires, without thinking, that somebody or other shall provide her with a comfortable hot-house. She is never actively nor consciously immoral: she is, in fact, more sinned against than sinning: and yet she is doomed inevitably to drift downward to the gutter because, in every crisis of her life, she naturally follows the line of least resistance.

The life-history of such a character as this affords a fitting theme for any novelist; and, indeed, the story of *Iris* must necessarily remind the reader of George Eliot's protracted study—step by step—of the gradual disintegration of Tito Melema, in *Romola.* Such a study demands, apparently, a freer scope in handling the restrictive categories of place and time than is ordinarily accorded to practitioners of the contemporary drama. Pinero solved this problem by assorting his narrative into no less than nine distinct pigeonholes of time. His play was delivered in five acts,—instead of the prevailing four or three; and in both the first act and the third he divided the action into three episodes, which were punctuated by the falling of the curtain. This tech-

nical device of indicating a lapse of time within the compass of an act by lowering the curtain for thirty seconds was unprecedented in 1901; but since that date—by reason of Pinero's high example—it has become so common that it is now employed in half a hundred plays each season.

Whereas the entire action of *The Gay Lord Quex* was compressed within the scope of twenty-four hours, the action of *Iris* is protracted over an imagined period of more than two years. In his handling of the troublous category of time, the judgment of Pinero has always been emphatically just. He has never been seduced—as Ibsen was seduced when he planned the final act of *Hedda Gabler*—to falsify the facts of life in order to complete the pattern of his play according to a predetermined ticking of the clock.

Because the theme is "novelistic," *Iris* lacks, of course, that concentration which has been exhibited in several of Pinero's other dramas; but it is not, by any means, devoid of indications of his customary dramaturgic skill. One of the chief traits of cleverness in the theatre is the ability to convey to the audience an abstract and general idea of human conduct through the medium of an action that shall be utterly concrete, completely simple, and yet, in a transcendental sense, symbolic. Such instances are offered in *Iris* by the "business" of the ring in the first act, by the "business" of the cheque-book at the close of the third act, and by the cleverly repeated "business" of the key and the vase, at the outset and at the very end of the ominous fourth act. Of these three instances, the most impressive is, of course, the scene with the cheque-book; because this moment marks the crisis and the turning point in the career of Iris. She has indignantly refused the sordid offer of financial help from Maldonado; and in this refusal she was utterly sincere. Nevertheless, having set a considerable sum to her account, Maldonado leaves behind him, with apparent carelessness, this little baited hook with which he hopes to tempt her to adopt the easy habit of relying on his bounty. It is thoroughly significant of the character of Iris that the first

cheque which she ever writes is drawn for the generous purpose of setting up in business a young woman who was formerly her social-secretary and who now stands in need of funds. In signing this cheque, Iris signs—so to speak—her own death-warrant; yet this tragic act is motivated by an impulse which is utterly unselfish and, in itself, distinctly laudable. The entire abstract meaning of the play is illustrated, with tremendous irony, in this single simple scene; and this meaning is delivered emphatically to the audience by means of the manipulation of a concrete object of "stage-property."

I find myself unable to agree with Mr. William Archer that a *scène a faire* has been omitted between the third act and the fourth. To my mind, the dramaturgical effect of the heroine's hiatus of aimless drifting is all the more impressive when the story of this period is narrated retrospectively by Iris to her lover in the fifth and final act. Because of the inherent dissidence between her intentions and her acts, her own opinion of her own behaviour in those moments when she has surrendered to the pressure of embattled circumstances is more dramatically interesting than any first-hand exhibition of the facts themselves. The actual capitulation of the heroine to the prolonged besiegement of her millionaire admirer is less important than her subsequent revulsion from the disillusioning results of this enforced capitulation.

The same critic has told us that, "until *Iris* was three parts finished, Sir Arthur Pinero intended the play to end with the throttling of Iris by Maldonado." I have never interrogated the author on this point; but Mr. Archer's statement seems easily acceptable. In any case, it may be pointed out that the actual ending is more impressive and more truly tragic than any imaginable incident of murder. The final exit of Iris is overwhelming in effect for the very reason that she fares forth without any purpose and that nobody can possibly foresee the fate that is in store for her. This tragic exit was probably suggested by the aimless

exodus of Nora from the *Doll's House* of Ibsen; and it has been subsequently imitated in America by Mr. Eugene Walter, at the close of a play which, in many traits, is somewhat similar to *Iris,*—the highly-heralded drama entitled *The Easiest Way.*

Among the many merits of Pinero that are likely to escape notice in the library—by reason of the fact that the average reader seldom realizes that plays, like children, should be seen, not heard—is his cleverness in handling the difficult category of place. His stage-sets are worked out with exceeding care and in the most punctilious detail, with the purpose of environing the characters with a visible background that shall contribute easily and naturally to each successive exigency of the action. This is, perhaps, a minor point; but the studious reader is advised emphatically not to skip the detailed stage-directions which describe the three successive sets in *Iris.* Note also the handling of the weather in the third act, and the way in which the coming of the rain is made to contribute to the intensification of a predetermined mood.

At the outset of *Iris,* the most difficult points of exposition are disposed of, with celerity and ease, in the preliminary conversation between Miss Pinsent and Archie Kane. The perverse will of the deceased husband of the heroine—which constitutes, of course, a condition precedent to the entire plot—is explained and discussed in such a way that the audience is persuaded to accept the statement that "wills such as Mr. George Adair Bellamy's are common enough." Also, at the same time, the audience is offered a hint of the subsequent dark chapter in Archie Kane's career, when Miss Pinsent insists upon confiding to his care the savings of her life-time. This incident affords a notable example of that technical device which has been defined by Mr. William Archer as "foreshadowing without forestalling." The audience is not permitted to foresee that this sleek solicitor, with "an orchid in his button-hole," is predestined to turn out an absconder and a scoundrel; yet, when the news of his ob-

liquity is suddenly delivered at the close of the second act, the audience has been prepared to say, "I told you so."

A play so "novelistic" in material and method as the present drama,—a play that is necessarily protracted over more than two years of imagined time,—requires, at the outset of each act, certain passages of exposition that shall report the intervals of time which have been assumed in the pauses of the action. This requirement is satisfied with such extraordinary skill that—after the initiation of the first act —there appear to be no passages that are purely expository in intention. Each backward-looking scene in *Iris* seems rather to be forward-looking, and to exist merely for the purpose of showing character in action. A technical task of scarcely precedented difficulty has been accomplished with such cleverness that the accomplishment might easily escape the notice of students not inured, by practice, to the problems of play-making.

In composing more than forty plays, Pinero has been called upon to imagine more than half a thousand characters. It is not surprising, therefore, to discern certain repetitions—or reversions to type—in the invention of his minor people. In *Iris,* the amiable Croker Harrington betrays a family resemblance to the Cayley Drummle of the *Second Mrs. Tanqueray,* and Aurea Vyse is, in most respects, the same *jeune fille* that had appeared in several of Pinero's earlier plays. The minor characters of *Iris* are mere types —the same types that Pinero had projected often in the past. But the leading characters are "strange and new,"— to quote a memorable phrase of Robert Browning's. Iris Bellamy herself stands unique among Pinero's women, because—despite her ineradicable weaknesses of character— she is always fine and always likable and never yields to the undermining of vulgarity. She ends up in the gutter, and this final chapter is inevitable; but, to the bitter end, she remains the sort of woman that one would be glad to dine with,—whereas it would be only natural to hesitate before accepting a dinner invitation from Paula Tanqueray,

or Letty, or Zoe Blundell, or even Agnes Ebbsmith. Maldonado, the magnificent and overbearing Jewish millionaire, is studied with an intensity of analytic interest that was—possibly—made more emphatic by the author's own consciousness of his inheritance of Latin and of Jewish blood. In both of the original productions—in England and afterward in the United States—this unprecedented and tremendous personage was depicted, with superb success, by Mr. Oscar Asche,—an actor whose great gifts, both physical and mental, were precisely suited to this difficult impersonation. Trenwith, of course, is little more than the usual "leading man"; yet there are many traits in his character which distinguish him from other creatures of this breed. In *Iris,* Pinero has brought us face to face with several people who are worth meeting on their own account, and has thereby lifted us above the ordinary level of the realistic drama.

Iris was first produced in 1901; and it would not be fair to the reading public to refrain from mentioning the fact that the same theme was discussed, several years later, by Mr. John Galsworthy in *The Fugitive.* If any evidence were needed to attest the superiority of Sir Arthur Pinero over Mr. Galsworthy as a dramaturgic craftsman, it would be sufficient to study, side by side, the text of *The Fugitive* and the text of *Iris.* The ideas of these two dramas are very nearly similar; the fundamental stories of the two plays are almost indistinguishable; yet there is a world of difference between the finished products. Pinero, in the patterning of *Iris,* has not missed a single *scène a faire,* despite the interrogative opinion of Mr. William Archer. Pinero seizes and develops all the high points of his story, and removes to the limbo of his off-stage narrative only such passages as are subsidiary to the conduct of his plot. But, in Mr. Galsworthy's *The Fugitive,* we feel that several passages which are narrated retrospectively are more important than those other scenes in the course of which these off-stage happenings are expounded, so to speak, at second hand.

Each successive crisis in the gradual decay of the character of Iris is shown and illustrated on the stage; but Mr. Galsworthy's conduct of the similar story of the gradual disintegration of Claire Dedmond is comparatively faltering and ineffective. In this instance, Mr. Galsworthy—by a challenge of his own—has met a peer in a fair fight on equal ground, and has been quite easily unhorsed by an antagonist who was more greatly gifted with an instinct for the exigencies of the theatre.

C. H.

IRIS

A DRAMA IN FIVE ACTS

THE PERSONS OF THE PLAY

Frederick Maldonado
Laurence Trenwith
Croker Harrington
Archibald Kane
Colonel Wynning
Servant at Mrs. Bellamy's in Kensington
Servant at the Villa Prigno

Iris Bellamy
Fanny Sylvain
Aurea Vyse
Mrs. Wynning
Miss Pinsent
Woman-servant at the Villa Prigno
Woman-servant at the Flat in Park Street

The First Act

London. Mrs. Bellamy's House in Kensington.

The Second Act

Italy. The Villa Prigno at Cadenabbia on the Lake of Como.

The Third Act

The Same.

The Fourth Act

London. A Flat in Park Street.

The Fifth Act

The Same.

In both the First Act and the Third the action is divided into three Episodes, which are marked by the falling of the curtain. Between the Third Act and the Fourth two years are supposed to elapse.

IRIS

Original cast, as first disclosed at the Garrick Theatre, September 21st, 1901.

Frederick Maldonado	*Mr. Oscar Asche*
Laurence Trenwith	*Mr. Charles Bryant*
Croker Harrington	*Mr. Dion Boucicault*
Archibald Kane	*Mr. Jerrold Robertshaw*
Colonel Wynning	*Mr. Henry Bayntun*
Servant at Mrs. Bellamy's in Kensington	*Mr. Albert Sims*
Servant at the Villa Prigno	*Mr. Cory Thomas*
Iris Bellamy	*Miss Fay Davis*
Fanny Sylvain	*Miss Beryl Faber*
Aurea Vyse	*Miss Nora Lancaster*
Mrs. Wynning	*Miss Regina Repton*
Miss Pinsent	*Mrs. Maesmore Morris*
Woman-servant at the Villa Prigno	*Miss Lilian Deane*
Woman-servant at the Flat in Park Street	*Miss Francis*

IRIS

THE FIRST ACT

The scene represents two drawing-rooms of equal size upon the ground floor of a house in Kensington. In the wall separating the rooms are two arched entrances—the one on the right-hand side, the other on the left—and in the centre, between these entrances, is a fireplace. Over the fireplace is an opening, shaped and framed like a mirror; so that, with the view gained through the archways, the further room is almost entirely disclosed. In this further room, on the left, is a single door admitting to a small apartment; in the centre, at the back, is a conservatory seen through glazed doors; and on the right is a window affording a view of a garden. On the left-hand side of the room nearer the spectator are double-doors opening from the inner hall of the house; and, on the right, facing these doors, there is a spacious circular bow in which are three french-windows also looking on to the garden. The rooms are richly furnished and decorated. In the further room a grand piano—adorned with paintings in the style of Watteau and Lancret—and a music-stool stand by the window. By the side of the piano is a chair; and on the other side of the room are two chairs, placed together, under the branches of a high palm. Against the walls are cabinets containing articles de vertu. *In the nearer room there is an armchair on each side of the fireplace, and, facing the fireplace, a luxurious "Ches-*

terfield" settee with a piece of rich silk draped over the back. Behind the settee stands a French ottoman. On the left of the room are a settee of a more formal kind, a table, and a "window-stool"; and on the right a writing-table and two chairs—the one in front of the table, the other by the side of it. Also on the right, between the bow and the entrance to the further room, another high palm shelters a smaller settee. There are flowers in profusion; some are arranged in vases and jardinières, while a bank of blossom partially conceals the fireplace.

The light is that of a fine evening in summer. The warm glow of sunset is seen in the garden and in the conservatory.

[NOTE:—*The descriptions of the scenery, and the directions for the movement of the characters, are set out as from the point of view of the audience. Thus, Right and Left are the spectator's right and left, not the actor's.*]

[MISS PINSENT, *a cheerful young lady in dinner dress, is seated at the writing-table, writing. A man-servant enters from the hall.*]

SERVANT.

Mr. Kane.

[*The servant is followed by* ARCHIBALD KANE, *a "smart," well-tailored man of middle age. He carries an opera hat, wears an orchid in his button-hole, and has an air of some authority.*]

MISS PINSENT.

[*Advancing and shaking hands with him cordially.*] How do you do? [*To the servant, who withdraws.*] Tell Mrs. Bellamy. [*To* KANE.] She is not down yet.

KANE.

Don't be scandalized at my premature appearance. She has asked me to give her a few minutes' talk before her guests arrive.

MISS PINSENT.

[*Laughingly.*] I see. For a quarter of an hour you are not a guest.

KANE.

[*In the same spirit.*] Merely a hard-working, conscientious solicitor. And how are you, my dear Miss Pinsent?

MISS PINSENT.

I? [*Again at the writing-table, putting the writing-materials in order.*] A woman who has the good fortune to be attached to the household of such a sweet creature as Mrs. Bellamy can't be otherwise than robust and happy.

KANE.

I need not ask after her; she was looking radiant at Hurlingham on Saturday.

MISS PINSENT.

Yes—out of the house.

KANE.

Nothing amiss, I hope?

MISS PINSENT.

She seems depressed, in low spirits.

KANE.

The end of the season—fatigue.

MISS PINSENT.

Scarcely. She has been fretting for weeks.

KANE.

Fretting?

MISS PINSENT.

Brooding.

KANE.

Upon what?

MISS PINSENT.

What does my sex brood over? Religion, the affections, the discovery of a grey hair, anything, everything. [*Returning to him.*] I rather fancy the old grievance still irritates her occasionally.

KANE.

The old——?

MISS PINSENT.

Her husband's will.

KANE.

Ho! Poor dear lady, will she never become reconciled to its conditions?

MISS PINSENT.

Never is a big word. After all, these are early days.

KANE.

She has been five years a widow.

MISS PINSENT.

She is only six-and-twenty now.

KANE.

And well-off, as far as her heedlessness in money-matters will permit of her being so. Let her compare her situation with that of other women. Six-and-twenty and independent!

MISS PINSENT.

And unable to re-marry!

KANE.

She could commit even that indiscretion if she pleased.

MISS PINSENT.

Under penalty of losing every penny of her income.

KANE.

If she married a rich man, her interest in her late husband's estate would be no longer indispensable to her.

MISS PINSENT.

Rich men generally have some odious quality to counterbalance their wealth. The men one would marry are as poor as mice.

KANE.

[*Shrugging his shoulders.*] Well, wills such as Mr. George Adair Bellamy's are common enough.

MISS PINSENT.

The more's the shame. [*With mock severity.*] I wonder you care to be a trustee under so iniquitous an instrument.

KANE.

Ha, ha! the position isn't altogether a bed of roses. It has already worried my fellow-trustee, poor Mr. Cautherley, into his grave. However, we ought not to discuss Mrs. Bellamy's affairs too freely.

MISS PINSENT.

Of course not; I beg your pardon. [*With a change of manner.*] I say, Mr. Kane.

KANE.

Yes?

MISS PINSENT.

I wish you would render me a service.

KANE.

Delighted.

MISS PINSENT.

You are connected with a number of little concerns that pay decent dividends, aren't you—nice, snug little schemes that the public isn't allowed to dip its hands into?

KANE.

Who tells you so?

MISS PINSENT.

Mrs. Bellamy. She says you do wonders for her great friend, Miss Sylvain, and for Mr. Harrington.

KANE.

Well?

MISS PINSENT.

I've managed to scrape together nearly three hundred pounds. To you it's the merest trifle, but—[*coaxingly*] you might help a poor lady's-companion to increase her store.

KANE.

Ha, ha!

MISS PINSENT.

Don't laugh. Let me come and see you, will you?

KANE.

Honoured.

MISS PINSENT.

In Lincoln's Inn Fields?

KANE.

[*Writing on his shirt-cuff.*] To-morrow?

MISS PINSENT.

[*With a nod.*] At what time?

KANE.

Four o'clock?

MISS PINSENT.

Oh, I'm awfully obliged; I—[*listening*] This is she, I think.

[IRIS, *richly but delicately gowned, enters, at the door in the further room, drawing on her gloves. She comes to* KANE *and gives him her hand. She is a beautiful woman, with a soft, appealing voice and movements instinct with simple grace and dignity. Her manner is characterised by a repose amounting almost to languor.*]

MISS PINSENT.

[*Taking from the writing-table the paper upon which she has been writing and presenting it to* IRIS.] The arrangement of the couples at dinner.

[IRIS *slips the paper into her bodice, and* MISS PINSENT *withdraws, passing through the further room.*]

IRIS.

[*Glancing into the further room, to assure herself that she and* KANE *are alone, then indicating the doors in the nearer room.*] Is there a draught?

[*He closes the doors while she seats herself upon the ottoman.*]

IRIS.

I want to talk to you, Archie, concerning a young man in whom I am slightly interested.

KANE.

[*Sitting, facing her, upon the window-stool.*] Oh yes.

IRIS.

A Mr. Trenwith.

KANE.

Do I know him?

IRIS.

You may have met him; he has been about this season a great deal. Surely I introduced him to you one night during "La Bohème"?

KANE.

Oh, is he the good-looking boy I have seen in your box at the opera several times recently?

IRIS.

Two or three times.

KANE.

His name had escaped me. And he was at Hurlingham with you on Saturday, wasn't he?

IRIS.

More with the Littledales than with me. I gave him a lift down. He's quite poor, you know.

KANE.

Really? He must have friends—the Littledales, for example.

IRIS.

Women-friends who ask him to parties. They are of no use when even a cab-fare is a consideration. It occurred to me that you might be inclined to exert your influence in some direction or another in his behalf.

KANE.

What's his age?

IRIS.

Twenty-eight, I am afraid.

KANE.

Whew! Ever done anything?

IRIS.

He has tried many things.

KANE.

[*Ominously.*] H'm!

IRIS.

His great misfortune was being ploughed for the army. That was a thousand pities. Lately he has been reading for the bar; but he finds he has no taste for law. His ear for music is wonderful, and he draws cleverly in pastel.

KANE.

The failures in life are masters of the minor talents.

IRIS.

[*In gentle reproof.*] Hush! And now his only relative with money and position—an uncle who is an archdeacon —has become disheartened. You would expect an archdeacon to be sympathetic and patient, would you not?

KANE.

Beyond a certain point, I would not.

IRIS.

You are too cynical. At any rate, this uncle offers him a few hundred pounds on the understanding that he goes out to a cattle-ranche in British Columbia—a dreadful place, a sort of genteel Siberia. I am so grieved for the boy.

KANE.

A difficult case.

IRIS.

Don't say that.

KANE.

He belongs to a large class; he is a young gentleman to whom it is absolutely essential that somebody should bequeath five-thousand-a-year.

IRIS.

You will jest, Archie.

KANE.

My dear Iris, what career is there, apart from the criminal, for engaging but impecunious incapacity? In its usual course, it begins with a beggarly secretaryship, passes through the intermediate stages of a precarious interest in a wine business and a disastrous association with the Turf and the Stock Exchange, and ends with the selling, on commission, of an obsolete atlas or an unwieldy bible.

IRIS.

[*Shudderingly.*] Terrible!

KANE.

Will you follow my advice?

IRIS.

[*With a sigh of discontent.*] Oh!

KANE.

Back up the archdeacon. Urge the young man to clear out without delay.

[*She rises and moves to the fireplace, where she stands looking down upon the flowers.*]

KANE.

[*Rising with her.*] I appear extremely disagreeable.

IRIS.

No, no.

KANE.

[*Strolling over to the writing-table and examining a photograph which he finds there.*] This is Mr. Trenwith, is it not?

IRIS.

[*After a glance in his direction, sitting upon the settee facing the fireplace.*] Yes.

KANE.

[*Replacing the photograph and approaching her.*] Shall I bore you by offering a little further counsel?

IRIS.

You are very good.

KANE.

[*Sitting on the ottoman.*] Iris, a woman in your position can't be too cautious.

IRIS.

Cautious?

KANE.

I don't want to disturb you by recalling the terms of poor George's will. At the same time——

IRIS.

[*Turning to him.*] My dear Archie, nothing that *you* can say upon the subject will disturb me. The threats of that will seem to me to be weaved into the decorations of my walls. I construe them daily, almost hourly. [*Closing her eyes as she recites.*] "You forfeit all interest in your late husband's estate by re-marrying." I tread them into my carpets. [*As before.*] "In such an event the whole source of your income passes to others." The street-music makes a lilt of them. "You have no separate estate; wed again and you cease to be of independent means." When a stranger is presented to me, I divine his thoughts instantly. "Why, you are the woman," he remarks to himself, "who loses her money by re-marrying." [*Reclining upon a pillow with a faint attempt at a laugh.*] Ha! For the thousandth time, why are such provisions made, can you tell me?

KANE.

They are designed primarily, I hope, to protect the widow——

IRIS.

To protect her!

KANE.

From unscrupulous men, from fortune-hunters. In the present instance, for example, it is only fair to assume that your husband, knowing how greatly your happiness depends upon personal comfort, was actuated solely by a desire to safeguard you.

IRIS.

Ah, this safeguarding of women! Its effects may be humiliating, cruel.

KANE.

H'm! Upon one of its effects, as concerning yourself, I should like to lay particular stress. May I be perfectly frank?

IRIS.

Do.

KANE.

Allow me to remind you, then, that a lady circumstanced as you are—still youthful, beautiful——

IRIS.

[*Touching his sleeve gently.*] Sssh!

KANE.

Who is seen constantly in the company of a young man whom she could not dream of marrying, subjects herself inevitably to a considerable amount of ill-natured criticism.

[*She raises herself, looking at him.*]

KANE.

Criticism—conjecture—scandal.

IRIS.

[*After a brief pause.*] I didn't think you meant that. Ah, thanks.

[*She leaves the settee, showing signs of discomposure.*]

KANE.

[*Standing before her.*] I have completely spoilt your enjoyment of your little dinner-party.

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Dear friend. This is the advantage of employing a fashionable solicitor, one whose practice has its roots in the gay parterres of Society. I get the gossip of the boudoir at first hand.

KANE.

[*Deprecatingly.*] My object——

IRIS.

[*Sweetly.*] Ah, I am infinitely obliged. [*Hesitatingly.*] But—Archie——

KANE.

Yes?

IRIS.

[*Her head averted.*] You don't believe, evidently, that I am capable of throwing selfish considerations to the winds —marrying a poor man——?

KANE.

You!

IRIS.

[*Sitting upon the window-stool.*] I know; the last woman on earth, you would say, who would find courage for such an act.

KANE.

Are you joking?

IRIS.

Ha!

KANE.

You marry a poor man; you with your utter disregard for the value of money! Why, luxury to you is the salt of life, my dear Iris. Great heavens!

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] I try to do a little good with my money, too, Archie.

KANE.

An indiscriminate sovereign to a beggar where a shilling would suffice; three times his fare to every cabman——

IRIS.

Oh, don't scold me!

KANE.

Not I. I gave that up long since. You were sent into the world so constituted.

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] So afflicted. You are right, Archie—the step would be preposterous.

KANE.

[*Raising his hands.*] Ho!

IRIS.

[*Wistfully.*] Only I should like to think that *I* don't shrink from it out of sheer worldliness and cowardice. I should like to think—tssh! [*Rising.*] As you observe, one is sent into the world, shaped this way or that. [*Producing* MISS PINSENT'S *memorandum and referring to it.*] Will you take Fanny Sylvain in to dinner?

KANE.

Charmed. Who are your guests?

IRIS.

Fanny and a little niece of hers whom she has taken under her wing, dear Croker, the Wynnings——

KANE.

Delightful.

IRIS.

[*Walking away from him, to avoid the embarrassment of meeting his eye.*] And Mr. Trenwith. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, and Frederick Maldonado.

KANE.

Maldonado!

IRIS.

Yes.

KANE.

May I say I'm glad? The wound is healed, then?

IRIS.

He writes begging me to include him again in my dinner-parties. Poor Maldo!

[*She is standing beside the writing-table. From a drawer she takes out a ring-case and produces a tiny ring.*]

KANE.

What's that?

IRIS.

[*Slipping the ring on to her finger and displaying it.*] A token. He gave it to me when he—at the time—telling me that, if ever I relented, I had only to return it to him without a word and, no matter what part of the globe it found him in, he would come to me on wings.

KANE.

The plumage is golden, in his case, Iris.

IRIS.

Yes. [*Closing her eyes for a moment.*] But I couldn't, Archie. [*Removing the ring from her finger thoughtfully.*] Yet I've been on the point of sending this to him more than once during the past month.

KANE.

You have?

IRIS.

[*Mechanically replacing the ring in its drawer.*] As a way out of my perplexity.

[*The double-doors are thrown open and a servant announces* "Miss Sylvain and Miss Vyse." IRIS *advances to greet* FANNY SYLVAIN, *who enters with* AUREA. FANNY *is a bright, attractive woman of thirty,* AUREA *a frank-looking girl still in her teens.* FANNY *and* IRIS *kiss affectionately.*]

IRIS.

Dear Fanny!

FANNY.

Dear Iris! [*Presenting* AUREA.] My niece, Aurea.

IRIS.

[*Advancing to* AUREA.] Ah!

FANNY.

[*Shaking hands with* KANE.] Well, Archie!

KANE.

[*Talking to her apart.*] How are you, Fanny? I've bad news for you.

FANNY.

[*Clutching his arm.*] No.

KANE.

I am to take you in to dinner.

FANNY.

[*Faintly.*] Brute! I thought you were going to tell me that some of my investments have gone wrong.

KANE.

Ha, ha, ha!

FANNY.

[*In an eager whisper.*] You are still doing well for me, Archie?

[MISS PINSENT *has reappeared in the further room; she now joins* FANNY *and* KANE, *shaking hands with the former.*]

IRIS.

[*With* AUREA, *by the settee on the left.*] And so this is your first dinner-party, Aurea?

AUREA.

Of a formal kind.

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] A few old friends gathered together for the last time this season.

AUREA.

Anyway, it is sweet of you to include me.

[COLONEL *and* MRS. WYNNING *are announced.* WYNNING *is a soldierly man of fifty-five, his wife a pleasant-looking lady much his junior.*]

IRIS.

[*Shaking hands with the* WYNNINGS.] How do you do? How do you do?

WYNNING.

How are you?

IRIS.

[*To both.*] Were you riding in the Park this morning?

MRS. WYNNING.

Jack was; I have lumbago.

IRIS.

That is very painful, is it not?

WYNNING.

[*With disgust.*] When I was a boy only servants had it. By Jove, these are levelling days with a vengeance! [*Shaking hands with* FANNY, *who has come to* MRS. WYNNING.] How you, Miss Sylvain? [*Seeing* KANE.] Hullo, Kane! [*Shaking hands with* MISS PINSENT.] How you?

MRS. WYNNING.

[*Greeting* MISS PINSENT.] How do you do?

[MRS. WYNNING, MISS PINSENT, *and* KANE, *in one group, and* COLONEL WYNNING *and* IRIS, *forming another, talk together on the right, while* FANNY *joins* AUREA, *who is now seated upon the settee on the left.*]

FANNY.

[*To* AUREA.] Well, are you disappointed?

AUREA.

She is adorable!

FANNY.

[*Sitting, facing* AUREA, *upon the window-stool—triumphantly.*] Ah!

AUREA.

When did you and she first know each other, aunt?

FANNY.

When she was fourteen. We were at school together. Even then there wasn't a girl who wouldn't have sold her little white soul for a caress from Iris. And the spell she casts never weakens. Here am I, a woman of thirty, and I believe she is more attractive to me than ever.

AUREA.

Of course she'll marry again; she must.

FANNY.

She has been pestered to distraction ever since she discarded her mourning.

AUREA.

[*Eagerly.*] Tell me, are any of the men dining here this evening in love with her?

FANNY.

Some of them are, or were. [*Glancing in the direction of the* WYNNINGS.] Colonel Wynning married that amiable creature over there in despair at having been refused three times.

AUREA.

[*Awe-stricken.*] Does his wife know it?

FANNY.

Certainly; and feels honoured, as she ought.

[*A servant announces,* "Mr. Harrington," *and* CROKER HARRINGTON, *a dapper but exceedingly ugly little man of five-and-thirty, enters gaily.*]

IRIS.

[*Welcoming him.*] So pleased to see you, Croker.

CROKER.

[*Kissing her hand gallantly.*] Dear lady! [*Discovering* FANNY.] Ah! those alabaster shoulders can belong but to one person.

FANNY.

[*Giving him her left hand, which he presses to his bosom.*] I hate you; you didn't come to the bazaar yesterday.

CROKER.

I did better; I told the richest man I know to go there.

FANNY.

Freddy Maldonado? He never turned up.

CROKER.

The traitor! My fingers shall be at his throat directly he appears. [*To* IRIS.] He's to be here to-night?

IRIS.

Yes.

[*He joins those on the right and is received joyously.* IRIS *exchanges a few words with* FANNY *and* AUREA, *and then, producing* MISS PINSENT'S *memorandum, goes to* CROKER.]

AUREA.

[*To* FANNY.] I hope that plain little gentleman has never dared——

FANNY.

Mr. Harrington? Oh, yes, Croker Harrington has dared in his time.

AUREA.

No!

FANNY.

He laughs openly at his repeated failures. He laughs till he cries, he says, but I suspect the laughter has not always accompanied the tears. Dear Croker! However, he is now resigned to his position.

AUREA.

His position?

FANNY.

He declares he wonders why the Inland Revenue people don't fine Iris for omitting to take out a dog-license for him.

AUREA.

[*Tenderly.*] Poor little man! Still, he is so exceedingly ugly.

FANNY.

The most sensible men in the world, my dear.

AUREA.

The ugly ones?

FANNY.

The vainest of them confide the truth to themselves at least once a day, while shaving.

[FREDERICK MALDONADO *is announced. He enters—a tall, massive man of about forty, with brown hair and beard, handsome according to the Jewish type, somewhat ebullient in manner, his figure already tending to corpulency.*]

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand, with perfect dignity.*] You have been too long a stranger, Maldo. Welcome!

MALDONADO.

[*Softly.*] Maldo—my old diminutive. Time is effaced by your use of it. [*Shaking hands with* FANNY.] Fanny——

FANNY.

You didn't patronize the bazaar yesterday, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

Sincere regrets. I found it impossible to get away from the City. [*Greeting* CROKER *and* KANE.] My dear Croker! Archie, my good friend!

IRIS.

[*Presenting him to the* WYNNINGS.] Mrs. Wynning, let me introduce Mr. Frederick Maldonado. Colonel Wynning——

[*He bows to them and shakes hands with* MISS PINSENT.]

AUREA.

[*To* FANNY.] Who is that?

FANNY.

Frederick, one of the great Maldonado family.

AUREA.

Great?

FANNY.

Well, not great—big; big financiers.

AUREA.

Foreign?

FANNY.

The grandfather was a Jew tradesman in Madrid who broke and went out to South America. He made a fortune in tobacco in Havannah and afterwards married an Englishwoman. Since then our public schools have been favoured with the education of the male Maldonados. They're reckoned among the three leading groups of financiers in Europe.

AUREA.

What is a financier, exactly?

FANNY.

A financier? Oh, a pawnbroker with imagination.

AUREA.

Aunt! And is *he* in love with——?

FANNY.

[*To* KANE, *who at this moment appears at her side.*] Ah! we are talking about *her*. How ethereal she looks this evening! My niece, Archie—[*to* AUREA] Mr. Kane.

[KANE *remains with them, talking. A servant announces,* "Mr. Laurence Trenwith," *and* LAURENCE, *a handsome, stalwart, but still boyish young man, enters.* IRIS *advances to meet him; her lips form the words of a welcome; they shake hands silently.*]

IRIS.

[*In a low, level voice.*] You know many who are here, I think. [*Moving away to the right, he following.*] You have met Mrs. Wynning? No? [*Presenting* LAURENCE.] Mr. Trenwith. Colonel Wynning. Mr. Harrington I am sure you know. Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[*Shaking hands with* MISS PINSENT *after bowing to the others.*] How do you do?

FANNY.

[*Who has risen—to* KANE, *in a whisper.*] Archie, thank goodness she starts for Switzerland on Saturday!

KANE.

[*To* FANNY, *with a nod.*] H'm. [*A servant enters.*]

SERVANT.

Dinner is served.

[*The servant retires.* IRIS *brings* LAURENCE *over to the left.*]

KANE.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How do you do?

FANNY.

[*Shaking hands with him.*] How are you, Mr. Trenwith? [FANNY *and* KANE *move away.*]

IRIS.

[*Presenting* LAURENCE *to* AUREA.] Mr. Trenwith—Miss Vyse. [*To* LAURENCE.] Will you take Miss Vyse?

LAURENCE.

With great pleasure.

IRIS.

[*In the centre of the room.*] Croker, please play host and go first with Mrs. Wynning.

[CROKER *gives his arm to* MRS. WYNNING *and they pass out.* COLONEL WYNNING, *after a polite offer of precedence to* KANE *and* FANNY, *follows with* MISS PINSENT. FANNY *and* KANE *go next, then* LAURENCE *and* AUREA. *To* MALDONADO'S *surprise,* IRIS *stands immovable, looking into space.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Proffering his arm.*] I am to have the honour——?

[*Suddenly, with a gleam of resolution in her eyes, she moves to the writing-table and again produces* MALDONADO'S *ring. She offers it to him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Receiving it incredulously.*] My ring!

IRIS.

The token, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Iris——? [*Intensely.*] Iris!

IRIS.

Hush! [*Passing him, then turning and placing her arm in his quite collectedly.*] Have you been abroad lately? I read of your being in Vienna in the spring——

[*The curtain falls as they go out. It rises again almost instantly, showing the window-blinds lowered and the rooms brilliantly lighted. In the conservatory little lamps glitter among the palms and flowers.* IRIS *and* MRS. WYNNING *occupy the settee in the centre;* FANNY *is in the chair on their right.* MISS PINSENT *is at the piano, playing the final bars of a nocturne of Chopin, while* AUREA *sits near her turning over some music. The men enter—*COLONEL WYNNING *and* KANE *appearing first;* MALDONADO, CROKER *and* LAURENCE *following.* IRIS *rises and motions* KANE *to withdraw with her from the rest.* MALDONADO *places himself beside* MRS. WYNNING; CROKER, *standing facing them, takes part in their talk.* WYNNING *and* FANNY *seat themselves on the settee under the palm on the right;* LAURENCE *joins* AUREA *and* MISS PINSENT *at the piano.*]

IRIS.

[*Standing by the settee on the left, speaking in a low voice.*] Archie——

KANE.

Yes?

IRIS.

You need be under no apprehension concerning me. I have done it.

KANE.

You have done what?

IRIS.

Ended my perplexity. I have told Frederick Maldonado I will marry him.

KANE.

Iris!

IRIS.

Not a word, if you please, to anybody. I will not have it announced till after I have left town.

KANE.

Accept my congratulations. What made you form this resolution so suddenly, may I ask?

IRIS.

I felt the sensation of stumbling, that I must snatch at something tangible. [*Closing her eyes.*] I am glad.

KANE.

I hope it is for your happiness.

IRIS.

It is for my safety. There is now no risk of further scandal should Mr. Trenwith decide to remain in England.

KANE.

[*Approvingly.*] Good!

IRIS.

On the other hand, if he migrates to British Columbia, I stifle the temptation to play housewife among the pots and pans of his poor little log-hut. I am secure either way.

KANE.

Whew! Then you did entertain the idea seriously?

IRIS.

[*Simply.*] I have been miserably perplexed.

[MISS PINSENT *plays some snatches of music lightly.* CROKER *approaches* IRIS *and* KANE.]

CROKER.

My dear Iris, what a delightful dinner you have given us!

KANE.

Your dinners are always charming.

IRIS.

[*Sitting upon the settee.*] My guests are always charming.

[KANE *moves away, joining* WYNNING *and* FANNY. WYNNING *yields his place to* KANE *and ultimately sits with* AUREA *under the palm in the further room.*]

CROKER.

[*Sitting facing* IRIS, *his tone changing slightly.*] Divinity, what's the matter with you to-night?

IRIS.

The matter?

CROKER.

Something disturbs you, distresses you.

IRIS.

[*Playfully.*] How do I show it, Faithful One?

CROKER.

[*In the same spirit.*] In your lustrous and never-to-be-forgotten eyes.

IRIS.

[*Beating a pillow and nestling in it.*] Ha! I am simply dog-weary. It has been a hard season for your poor Di-

vinity. Oh, how I am longing for my month among the mountains and my sun-bath at Cadenabbia!

CROKER.

You drop down to the lakes, then, after St. Moritz?

IRIS.

Yes, I am renting the Villa Prigno and its staff of servants from its owner, Mrs. Van Reisler, for a few weeks.

CROKER.

When are you off?

IRIS.

On Saturday. This is farewell.

CROKER.

I picture the caravan; the fair Pinsent, your courier, your maid, your fruit, your flowers, your birds—no, not those troublesome birds.

IRIS.

You know I never move anywhere without my birds. Are you coming to Switzerland this year?

CROKER.

[*Almost surlily, looking away.*] No. Perhaps. [*Softening.*] Of course I am. I am one of your human birds, Divinity.

IRIS.

One of my great, kind human birds, that fly after me wheresoever I go.

CROKER.

[*Bitterly.*] That fly, yes—and yet are caged.

IRIS.

[*Reprovingly.*] Hush! Croker!

CROKER.

I beg your pardon. It slipped out.

IRIS.

Ah, I'll not be vexed with you.

CROKER.

[*Remorsefully.*] I am continually breaking my promise. Some day you'll tire of me and send me about my business.

IRIS.

Never. [*Bending towards him.*] Faithful One, do you think I could afford to lose your true friendship, your ceaseless solicitude, your——?

[*She sees* LAURENCE—*who is now standing at the writing-table, waiting for an opportunity of approaching her—falters and breaks off.*]

IRIS.

[*In an altered tone.*] Croker, ask Kate to play my favourite mazurka—will you?

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Certainly.

[*He delivers his message to* MISS PINSENT, *remaining by her side while she plays. With a look,* IRIS *draws* LAURENCE *to her. As he advances she changes her place from the settee to the window-stool.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Standing beside her, speaking in a low voice.*] This is the first opportunity I have had of a word with you.

IRIS.

Yes.

LAURENCE.

I have something to tell you. May I——?
[*She motions him to the settee.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Sitting.*] I have accepted my uncle's proposal.

IRIS.

[*Unemotionally.*] You have?

LAURENCE.

There is nothing for it but that, nothing that I can hit upon. I go down to Rapley, to talk matters over with the old man, to-morrow.

IRIS.

Oh, yes.

LAURENCE.

So this may the last time we shall ever meet; unless you—oh, I feel how presumptuous I am to allude to it again!

IRIS.

Unless I——?

LAURENCE.

Could, after all, bring yourself to share my rough lot with me. A mad, selfish idea, I know. Feelings like mine make one mad.

IRIS.

Please! A mad idea, indeed.

LAURENCE.

[*With a break in his voice.*] It's good-by, then.

IRIS.

When will you be back from Rapley?

LAURENCE.

I sha'n't come back; my uncle insists upon my spending my remaining few hours with him. Then I shall go straight to Liverpool.

IRIS.

You sail——?

LAURENCE.

On the thirtieth—the day you start for Switzerland, I hear? [*She assents dumbly.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Appealingly.*] Let me stay behind for a few moments to-night after your friends have left.

IRIS.

I am sorry; Mr. Maldonado has already made a similar request.

LAURENCE.

Oh, but you can excuse yourself to him?

IRIS.

I—I fear not.

LAURENCE.

Forgive me. I thought, this being the end of our—[*rising*]—never mind.

[*She rises with him. They face one another.*]

LAURENCE.

I shall write to you from Rapley, if I may; and send you a wire from Liverpool. And when I get to Chilcoten—River Ranche, Chilcoten, British Columbia—I'll—would once a month be too often? Oh, how happy I've been!

[*She gives a quick glance round, conscious of a general movement, and sees that her guests are preparing to depart.* WYNNING *has joined* MRS. WYNNING.]

IRIS.

[*Hastily but composedly, in a low voice.*] Laurence——

LAURENCE.

Yes.

IRIS.

Return in about an hour's time. Be outside the house, on the other side of the way. Watch the door——

[*The* WYNNINGS *come to her.*]

IRIS.

[*Turning to* MRS. WYNNING.] Must you——?

MRS. WYNNING.

We have to go on.

WYNNING.

[*Cheerfully.*] Three o'clock in the morning again for us. This week sees the last of it, thank God.

MRS. WYNNING.

When one has lumbago one may as well keep upright as not.

IRIS.

I ought to follow you, but I am too indolent to-night.

MRS. WYNNING.

[*Kissing her.*] It has been so pleasant.

WYNNING.

[*Shaking hands.*] Charming.

[*They shake hands with the rest—who are engaged in bidding each other good-night—and withdraw,* MISS PINSENT *accompanying them.*]

IRIS.

[*To* FANNY, *who comes to her with* AUREA.] You too, Fanny?

FANNY.

Only to the Chadwicks, for the sake of this girl, and then to by-by. [*Kissing her on both cheeks.*] Your dinner-table looked superb.

AUREA.

Do let me thank you, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

IRIS.

[*To* AUREA.] Well——?

AUREA.

[*In answer.*] Oh, I should like to dine out every night of my life!

IRIS.

Ha!

AUREA.

If I could always watch your face through the flowers.

[IRIS *kisses her and walks with them to the door.*]

FANNY.

Will you be at home at tea-time to-morrow?

IRIS.

To you, Fanny. *Au revoir!*

[*They depart as* CROKER *approaches her.*]

IRIS.

Are you for gaieties, Croker?

CROKER.

Not I. [*Kissing her hand.*] The last act of "Messaline" and a glance at the telegrams at the club will see me

through. [*In the doorway.*] I shall be on the platform at Victoria.

IRIS.

[*Gratefully.*] No, no; you mustn't trouble.

CROKER.

[*With a quick look into her face.*] Trouble! good heavens! [*He disappears.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Formally, as he shakes hands with her.*] Thank you for a most delightful evening.

IRIS.

So nice of you to come.

LAURENCE.

Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night. [*He withdraws.*]

KANE.

[*Shaking hands with her.*] Shall we meet again before you run away?

IRIS.

Hardly.

KANE.

Well—a pleasant holiday!

IRIS.

And to you, Archie.

KANE.

[*Pausing in the doorway, dropping his voice.*] Once more, congratulations.

IRIS.

Thanks.

[*He goes. She closes the doors and turns, to find herself in* MALDONADO'S *arms.*]

IRIS.

Ah, no!

MALDONADO.

At last!

IRIS.

Oh!

MALDONADO.

Sweetest!

IRIS.

Maldo! [*Freeing herself with a gesture of repugnance.*] Maldo!

[*She brushes past him, and stands, greatly ruffled, by the chair beside the writing-table. He regards her silently for a moment, puzzled.*]

MALDONADO.

[*After the silence.*] Oh, pardon me, my dear. The stored-up feelings of—a life-time, it seems——! It would be an exceedingly poor compliment to you were I less ardent.

[*She takes a bottle of salts from the writing-table and drops into the chair.*]

IRIS.

I—I am tired, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Brightening.*] Ah, naturally; and I most inconsiderate. [*Coming to the back of her chair.*] I was rough—savage. A woman should always find repose on the breast of her lover. [*Bending over her.*] Let me prove to you how gentle I can be.

IRIS.

Er—it is late, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Glancing at the clock on the mantelpiece.*] Barely eleven. [*Turning to her.*] Late! [*Twisting his beard, thoughtfully.*] You who never leave the opera till the final bar is played——! [*Placing himself between her chair and the writing-table.*] But I won't plague you further. [*Sitting upon the edge of the table and inclining his body towards her.*] I only ask you to grant me one favour before you dismiss me to-night.

IRIS.

Favour?

MALDONADO.

Bestow upon me the title I have coveted so long. It is comprised in a single word. The faintest movement of those beautiful, still lips will suffice. You have but to whisper it to send me through the streets in air. Whisper!

IRIS.

What?

MALDONADO.

I am your beloved, am I not? Simply call me—Beloved.

IRIS.

We—we are not boy and girl, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Boy! I! no. [*His eyes glowering.*] A boy is not scorched-up, body and soul, by such a passion as you inspire me with. [*She rises, turning from him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Also rising, apologetically.*] Ah, I scare you again! You'll think me a hot-blooded tyrant. Don't fear: it is

merely for the moment—the suddenness of my delight——! Besides, you must make some small allowance for me; we Maldonados are not yet wholly English in our ways. You shall complete my education. We'll begin the course of instruction at once—begin by my promptly leaving you to your slumbers. [*Taking her hand and crumpling it fondly.*] There! was there ever a more docile pupil? [*In an outburst, impulsively pressing her hand to his lips and covering it with passionate kisses.*] Ah, sweetest, be kind! melt! be warm! be warm!

IRIS.

[*Regaining possession of her hand.*] Maldo—listen!—Maldo—I—I am dreadfully sorry. What I tell you now I ought to have told you before returning your ring—your token. Maldo, I haven't the love for you a woman should have for the man who is to be her husband; in that respect I am as you have always known me. But I will try to do my duty faithfully as mistress of your house, if that will satisfy you. I can promise no more, but I will do my duty—strictly and honourably, Maldo, strictly and honourably.

[*She moves away to the centre. He approaches her slowly.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At her side, his softness gone, speaking in a harsh, grating voice—swallowing an oath.*] By——! I should scarcely have thought it possible! Yes, you positively deceived me—the astute Freddy Maldonado! You've had me in a fool's paradise for nearly three hours.

IRIS.

Deceived——?

MALDONADO.

What an ass! I really imagined—for three mortal hours! —that it was reserved for me to escape the proverbial fate of the millionaire where the love of woman is concerned!

IRIS.

[*In protest.*] Maldo!

MALDONADO.

[*Sharply.*] Why are you marrying me, then? Eh? Why are you prepared to marry me?

IRIS.

You are very good, Maldo, very generous——

MALDONADO.

Ah, yes.

IRIS.

Amiability itself——

MALDONADO.

Quite so.

IRIS.

There is no man for whom I have sincerer respect; none, Maldo, none.

MALDONADO.

Yes, yes; all that. But I assume that the qualities you enumerate, admirable as they are, would hardly suffice to induce you to resign your own comfortable fortune were I not able to offer you a pretty solid exchange.

IRIS.

A woman, at such a crisis of her life, is swayed by many considerations, of course, Maldo. I am past the romantic age. You—you must think what you please; I cannot defend myself.

[*She sits upon the ottoman stonily. Leaving her, he walks about the room giving vent to short outbursts of ironical laughter. Ultimately he flings himself on to the settee on the left.*]

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho! [*His laughter dying out—bitterly.*] Why, I suppose I ought to be profoundly grateful to you for your candour. The generality of women—ha, ha! And better now than subsequent to marriage! And, after all, you give yourself to me—give yourself in a fashion; in the only fashion, it may be—I must console myself with that—in the only fashion in which your temperament allows you to yield yourself. Come, I can't lose you utterly, my dear. I'll be a philosopher and say Thanks. Thanks. [*Returning to her side.*] Thanks.

IRIS.

[*In a murmur.*] Thanks, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Grimly.*] It's a bargain, then? You to be mine; as much mine as the Velasquez, the Raphael, hanging on my walls—mine, at least, to gaze at, mine to keep from others?

[*Her head droops in acquiescence.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Gradually regaining some part of his good-humour.*] And in return I promise that you shall be one of the most envied women in Europe. Oh, you shall attain your ambition; you shall realise what wealth is, steep yourself in it to your heart's content!

IRIS.

[*Rising, penitently.*] Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Tsch, my dear! I'll not reproach you. You are as God made women, and I—I am a millionaire. [*After a pause, during which she plays with her handkerchief helplessly.*] Well, I'll be gone. I fear I've gravely imperilled my character for amiability.

IRIS.

Oh——! [*Giving him her hand.*] Maldo——

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

Perhaps—perhaps, as the years grow, it may become different between us.

MALDONADO.

[*Gripping her hand.*] Iris!

IRIS.

[*Hastily.*] Good-night.

MALDONADO.

[*Devouring her with his eyes.*] My—my queen! [*Drawing a deep breath.*] I take my luck!

[*He releases her, and she goes to the bell beside the fireplace and rings it.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At the door.*] Will you be in to me in the morning?

IRIS.

Yes.

MALDONADO.

A thousand apologies for keeping you up. Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night, Maldo.

[*He departs. With a cry, half of pain, half of weariness, she throws herself full-length upon the settee, and the curtain falls. After a brief pause it rises, disclosing the rooms empty and in darkness, and the window-shutters and the shutters of the conservatory*

doors closed and barred. A key turns in its lock and one of the double-doors is opened gently, and IRIS *enters, followed by* LAURENCE TRENWITH. *She motions him to pass her, and carefully closes the door. Then she switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table on the left and, silently and impassively, seats herself upon the window-stool. Having deposited his hat and overcoat upon the settee on the right, he comes to her and, throwing himself upon his knees before her, clasps her waist. She remains statue-like, her arms hanging by her side, looking down upon him with fixed eyes.*]

LAURENCE.

I can't help it! Pity me! Forgive me for being so daring. Remember, in the future I have to live upon my recollection of you—my recollection of how near I have been to you. To-night will stand out more distinctly than all the rest. You'll kiss me to-night, won't you—let me kiss you! [*She raises her hands to shield her face.*] For once, just for once! Ah, you'll not allow me to go without a kiss at parting! Picture me in my solitary little log-hut, alone after the day's work—twelve miles away from the nearest house, from the nearest companionable creature—and think what the memory of a single kiss will always mean to me. Oh, don't hide your face! Are you angry? Remove your hands! You *are* angry. I won't kiss you, then; I won't try to kiss you.

[*He attempts to uncover her face, whereupon she rises. He rises with her. There is silence between them for a while.*]

IRIS.

[*At length, controlling herself with an effort.*] Laurence—my poor friend—I have promised to marry Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] What!

IRIS.

Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[*Dully.*] When——?

IRIS.

When did I make the promise?

LAURENCE.

Y—yes.

IRIS.

To-night—last night, that is. It is past twelve, isn't it?

LAURENCE.

Yes.

[*He turns from her unsteadily and sinks upon the ottoman, his head bowed, his shoulders shaking convulsively.*]

IRIS.

[*At his side.*] Don't! don't! be strong! What difference can it make?

LAURENCE.

To me? None, I suppose. Oh, yes, yes, all the difference.

IRIS.

How——?

LAURENCE.

There would have been the hope. There would have been the hope.

IRIS.

Hope?

LAURENCE.

[*Mastering his emotion, and looking up at her.*] In spite of everything, I should have gone away with the hope that, some day, if I prosper, you would bid me come home to fetch you. And now—Mr. Maldonado. [*Rising.*] I beg your pardon; I ought to offer you my——

IRIS.

Thank you.

LAURENCE.

[*Gazing at her.*] You and Mr. Maldonado! I should hardly have—[*checking himself.*] I trust you will be extremely——

[*He fetches his hat and coat and returns to her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Brokenly.*] Of course, under the altered circumstances I won't think of troubling you with letters.

IRIS.

Perhaps it would be as well that you should not write, for a time at least. I shall never cease to be interested in your career. [*Losing some of her composure.*] Oh, you might have disguised it more thoroughly!

LAURENCE.

Disguised——?

IRIS.

Your astonishment at my marrying Mr. Maldonado. [*Feebly.*] He has loved me—he asked me to be his wife two years ago. And to-night I—quite suddenly—[*in an altered tone.*] Do you know that you and I were beginning to be the subject of tittle-tattle?

LAURENCE.

You and I?

IRIS.

Gossip.

LAURENCE.

[*Indignantly.*] Oh!

IRIS.

Scandal.

LAURENCE.

How dare people? Good heavens! to think I have brought this upon you! What an infamous world!

[*She shrugs her shoulders, smiling miserably.*]

LAURENCE.

Oh——! [*Going to the mantelpiece and leaning upon it.*] Oh, it's a dastardly world!

IRIS.

I didn't mean to add to your unhappiness. I only wished you to understand exactly what has occurred.

LAURENCE.

[*Turning to her.*] But now I am going away. That in itself will stop evil tongues. There is no necessity now for you to take this step, if you are taking it merely to stop scandal.

[*She sits, silently, upon the ottoman. Throwing his hat and coat aside, he kneels upon the settee and, bending over it, speaks almost into her ear.*]

LAURENCE.

Don't do this! don't! don't! There's no reason for it. You sha'n't! you shall not!

IRIS.

I must.

LAURENCE.

Not Maldonado!

IRIS.

I must.

LAURENCE.

Not the man I met here to-night!

IRIS.

[*Seizing his hands and holding them, in entreaty.*] Laurence——!

LAURENCE.

What?

IRIS.

I am totally unfit for the life you ask me to lead!

LAURENCE.

The life——?

IRIS.

Your wife—a farmer's wife—mistress of a log-hut—to work with my hands! I dare not!

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

IRIS.

Out there, here, anywhere, I am not fit to be a poor man's wife.

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

IRIS.

No, no, no; I will not.

LAURENCE.

You are marrying him to save yourself from me!

IRIS.

[*Faintly.*] Oh!

[*Her head drops back until it rests upon the edge of the settee. With a cry he presses a prolonged kiss*

upon her lips. She rises, her eyes closed, her hand pressed tightly upon her mouth.]

LAURENCE.

[*Guiltily.*] You'll despise me for that, always have a contempt for me.

[*After a pause, during which she is quite still, she moves to the writing-table and, seating herself before it, switches on the light of a lamp standing upon the table.*]

IRIS.

[*In a whisper.*] Laurence——

[*She selects a sheet of notepaper and writes, he looking on wonderingly. When she has finished her note she blots it, and hands it to him, and proceeds to address an envelope.*]

IRIS.

Read it. What have I said?

LAURENCE.

[*Reading.*] "Forget what has passed between us to-night. It cannot be. I entreat your forgiveness."

[*He returns the paper and she encloses it. Then she rises and, taking some flowers from a vase, moistens the envelope with the wet stalks. Having fastened the letter by pressing it with her handkerchief, she gives it to* LAURENCE.]

IRIS.

Let a messenger leave that at Mr. Maldonado's house in Mount Street before nine o'clock.

LAURENCE.

[*Pocketing the letter.*] Iris——!

[*She leaves him, with uncertain steps, and sinks upon the settee facing the fireplace. He follows her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Standing before her.*] What do you mean?

IRIS.

[*Half rising*]. I—I don't care! Follow me to Switzerland. Be near me——

[*She stretches out her arms to him, and they sit together in an embrace. The curtain falls.*]

END OF THE FIRST ACT.

THE SECOND ACT

[*The scene represents an apartment in a villa standing upon elevated ground running up from the west bank of the Lake of Como. The room, quadrantal in shape, is a spacious and lofty one. Its walls, decorated in slight relief, and its pilasters are of the purest white plaster. On the right-hand side of the room the wall is straight; in it, deeply recessed, are double-doors admitting to a hall; while the circular wall is broken by three vast windows, opening to the floor, at equal distances from each other. Outside these windows runs a balcony, the termination of which, at either end, is out of sight. Beyond the balcony are the tops of the trees—palms, magnolia in blossom, and others—growing in the garden below; and in the distance, under a deep blue sky, lie Bellagio and the juncture of the Lake of Como with that of Lecco. The furniture and hangings of the apartment—in contrast to the lightness of its decorations—are French, of the time of the first Empire. By the further window, which is open, stand a settee and a writing-table and chair. Near the door is a circular table covered with a white tablecloth and partially laid for a meal, and on each side of this table is a chair so placed as to suggest that the meal in preparation is for two persons. A cabinet standing against the wall serves as a sideboard; on it are dishes of fruit, decanters of wine, table-glass, etc., etc. On the other side of the room, by the nearer window, half of which is open, is another table littered with newspapers, magazines and books. On the left-hand*

side of this table is a settee; on the right a chair; and upon the floor, between the chair and the settee, are a heap of cushions, some loose sheets of music, and a guitar. A piece of sculpture fills the right-hand corner of the room, and some busts on pedestals occupy the spaces between the windows. On the balcony there are two or three chairs in basketwork and outside the middle window, standing upon the broad ledge of the balustrade, several cages of birds.

The light is that of a brilliantly fine morning in September. The sun enters through the nearer window; the rest of the balcony is in shade.

[*Two servants—a man and a woman—are engaged in laying the table near the doors for* déjeuner. FANNY SYLVAIN *and* AUREA—*dressed for walking—appear on the balcony, at the further window, coming from the right.*]

FANNY.

Good-morning.

MAN-SERVANT *and* WOMAN-SERVANT.

Good-morning, miss.

FANNY.

[*Entering.*] Mrs. Bellamy is out, the gardener tells me.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, miss. She has gone for a walk to a remezzo.

FANNY.

I wonder I didn't meet her. Alone?

MAN-SERVANT.

No, miss; with Mr. Trenwith.

FANNY.

[*Shortly.*] Oh.

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. Trenwith is sketching at Tremezzo, miss.

FANNY.

[*Displaying no further interest.*] Really?

MAN-SERVANT.

Mrs. Bellamy breakfasts at twelve, miss, so she can't be long.

FANNY.

[*Taking a magazine from the table on the left and seating herself on the settee by the nearer window.*] I'll wait a little while. [*To* AUREA, *who has followed her into the room.*] We'll wait, Aurea.

AUREA.

[*Sitting on the settee by the further window.*] I could gaze at this prospect for ever, aunt.

[*The woman-servant withdraws at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

[*To* FANNY.] Mr. 'Arrington is also waiting for Mrs. Bellamy, miss. I b'lieve you're acquainted with Mr. 'Arrington?

FANNY.

Mr. Croker Harrington!

MAN-SERVANT.

He came down last night from Promontogno. He's staying at Menaggio.

FANNY.

[*Rising.*] Where is he now?

MAN-SERVANT.

He's strolling about the garden, I fancy.

FANNY.

[*Gladly.*] Mr. Harrington has arrived, Aurea.

AUREA.

Has he, aunt?

FANNY.

[*Going out at the nearer window and looking down from the balcony into the garden.*] Isn't that he, by the fountain? [*Moving to the further end of the balcony as she calls.*] Croker! Cro—ker! [*Waving her sunshade.*] Croker! [*Re-entering the room.*] How jolly, Aurea—dear Croker!

AUREA.

[*Who is now standing by the table on the left—in a low voice.*] Do you think all this pleases Mrs. Bellamy, aunt?

FANNY.

All this——?

AUREA.

Her friends chasing her, as it must seem, from place to place while she is on her holiday.

FANNY.

[*Somewhat disconcerted.*] Why, it delights her, naturally.

AUREA.

It wouldn't me [*awkwardly*] if I wanted——

FANNY.

Wanted—what?

AUREA.

Rest—and seclusion.

[*The woman-servant reappears, showing in* CROKER HARRINGTON; *then she and her fellow-servant retire.*]

CROKER.

[*Kissing* FANNY'S *hand.*] My dearest Fanny!

FANNY.

Croker!

CROKER.

[*Advancing to* AUREA *and shaking hands with her.*] My dear Miss Vyse! Ladies, your appearance on a day already sufficiently brilliant is overpowering. [*Opening a white umbrella which he is carrying, and holding it before him.*] Remove your eyes from me, I entreat; they rob me of the shade!

FANNY.

What a fool you are, Croker! So you've turned up?

CROKER.

[*Shutting his umbrella.*] Last night.

FANNY.

You're at Menaggio?

CROKER.

You divine my most secret movements—at the Victoria. And you——?

FANNY.

[*With a jerk of the head towards the right.*] We're at the Belle Vue, Aurea and I.

CROKER.

Spick, span, comfortable Belle Vue! [*To* FANNY, *his hand upon his heart.*] But I daren't trust myself in too close a proximity——

FANNY.

[*Striking him gently with her sunshade.*] Idiot! Have you paid your devotions to our Divinity yet?

CROKER.

Not yet; it was too late to do so last night. You see much of her, of course?

FANNY.

[*Constrainedly.*] I've been here only a week. Yes, I see her for a few minutes every day.

CROKER.

A few minutes?

FANNY.

She's a good deal occupied.

CROKER.

Occupied?

FANNY.

[*Dryly.*] Sketching.

CROKER.

Sketching!

FANNY.

Aurea dear, the sun is off the front of the house. If you kept watch, you might run and meet Iris when she appears.

AUREA.

[*Obediently.*] Yes, aunt.

[*She goes out, at the nearer window, and talks to the birds.* FANNY *crosses over to the window and closes it.*]

FANNY.

[*Turning to him.*] What were we——?

CROKER.

I was about to commit myself to the observation that Iris doesn't sketch.

FANNY.

No, but Mr. Trenwith does.

CROKER.

[*Unconcernedly.*] Oh—ah—yes. Is Mr. Trenwith at Cadenabbia?

FANNY.

At the Britannia.

CROKER.

[*In the same spirit.*] H'm, h'm?

FANNY.

A few hundred yards from this villa.

[*There is a pause between them, during which he employs himself in idly turning over the newspapers upon the table on the left.*]

FANNY.

[*Seating herself on the settee by the further window.*] You were at St. Moritz during her stay there, you wrote and told me?

CROKER.

For a fortnight.

FANNY.

Mr. Trenwith happened to be there also, didn't he?

CROKER.

Yes.

FANNY.

[*Impatiently.*] He is regularly in her train.

CROKER.

Oh, hardly more than I, if it comes to that.

FANNY.

But he is young, charming, attractive in every way——

[*He throws his head back and laughs almost too uproariously.*]

FANNY.

[*Jumping up and coming to him penitently.*] I beg your pardon, Croker. You misunderstood me. Oh, be quiet! What I should have said was—one could wish that Miss Pinsent's successor were of another sex. Why was Miss Pinsent given her *congé* just before Iris left London? A pleasant, suitable person for a companion, surely! Wouldn't you consider her so?

CROKER.

I might consider her so.

FANNY.

[*Moving away.*] Don't be coarse. I had a letter last week from Evelyn Littledale. The Littledales were at St. Moritz, too. [*He nods in assent.*] Everybody was talking, Evelyn says.

CROKER.

Talking! What else is there to do at St. Moritz?

FANNY.

And here——

CROKER.

Here?

FANNY.

It is the same here. Everybody is talking.

CROKER.

The glass is falling. Two days of rain and the place will be empty.

FANNY.

People will carry the topic away with them. [*Leaning upon the back of the chair on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Mary Chadwick writes me from Scotland; *she* mentions it.

CROKER.

Pretty, bony, pimply Polly Chadwick!

FANNY.

It came to her from London. It has been brought to London already.

CROKER.

The only form of luggage that escapes a charge for excess.

FANNY.

You are too sententious! [*At the breakfast table, suddenly.*] Are you breakfasting with Iris?

CROKER.

[*Joining her.*] She doesn't know I've arrived.

FANNY.

Because I notice the table is laid for two. [*On his left.*] For mercy's sake, man, do show some signs of animation! You can be sprightly enough at times.

CROKER.

My dear Fanny, to what tune would you have me skip?

FANNY.

Why, astonishment—astonishment, at least, at our Divinity's extraordinary behaviour.

CROKER.

Is it extraordinary?

FANNY.

Can you find a milder phrase for it? I tell you, Croker, I can't sleep for worrying about Iris. When we were in town, and young Trenwith was fluttering round her, I was in a blue funk lest she should be tempted to marry him and

plunge herself into poverty. But now—well, I sometimes catch myself wishing that she would announce her engagement to him. [*Leaving* CROKER *and peering at* AUREA *through the centre window.*] My niece, too! I am certain she is beginning to wonder. [*Seating herself by the table on the left.*] What on earth are we to think of it all?

CROKER.

Think? That here are too well-intentioned young people with a natural fondness for each other's society. What else, pray, is there to think?

FANNY.

Oh, thanks, I appreciate the snub.

CROKER.

Best natured of your sex, I intend no snub. Bring me the man who presumes to snub you and I will slay him in your presence. No, no, I would only suggest to those who are disturbing you by their gossip that it is simply abominable that close companionships can't exist between reputable men and women without suspicion of wickedness. Faugh! why must this dear friend of ours be fastened upon? Cannot she be spared—a refined, delicate creature whose natural pride and dignity queens might envy? Oh, a little spoilt, if you will; petted by those who have the privilege of intimacy with her; luxurious in her habits, a born spendthrift, but never more prodigal—bless her!—than in her charities! I can remember little else to urge against her—except the difficulties of her position, none of her own making. She mustn't re-marry—that is, she may not marry whom she pleases. In heaven's name, is she to be gagged and manacled for that reason? She is still young—yes; yet from the fact of her already having been a wife—brief as was the duration of that experience—she can't be altogether an unwise woman. Is she not to be trusted to give wholesome counsel to a young man without the interruption of

a chaperon; is she never to play at mothering—like a sage child with a doll—a male companion belonging to her own generation? And this young fellow, this Trenwith? Is he necessarily an abandoned wretch? I like him. I wish I were in his shoes—better still, in his skin! I say is youth necessarily designing, necessarily vicious? I'll back it against age; and age isn't all bad, I console myself with believing, as I pull out a grey hair or two every morning. [*Pacing the room.*] Phuh! it nauseates me even to argue the matter. [*Sitting, on the left of the breakfast-table.*] Have you ventured to speak to Iris on the subject?

FANNY.

Not yet. I keep putting it off from day to day.

CROKER.

Why—feeling as strongly as you do?

FANNY.

I suppose I shrink from seeing a pair of placid, grey eyes turn on me with a look of surprise and reproach.

CROKER.

[*Triumphantly.*] Ha!

FANNY.

Oh, of course I know they will look so, and leave me to splutter out of my difficulty like a puppy who has been dropped into a pond. Yes, yes, of course, Croker, in my heart I know she is only foolish—foolish—foolish.

CROKER.

I won't admit even that; only that other people are malicious—malicious—malicious.

FANNY.

[*Going to him and laying a hand on his shoulder.*] What a friend you are!

CROKER.

Is there any other *rôle* for an ugly little devil to play in this world?

FANNY.

The friendship of a single man is worth that of a dozen women. [*Uneasily*]. I believe that if our Divinity really behaved as she has been doing in my nightmares——

CROKER.

[*Looking up at her.*] Your nightmares?

FANNY.

[*Avoiding his gaze.*] I believe you'd stick to her even then.

CROKER.

[*Under his breath.*] Good God, yes!

FANNY.

Through any disgrace?

CROKER.

Till death. My dear Fanny, please don't imagine such impossible contingencies. [*Abruptly.*] And you?

FANNY.

Ah, there's the difference between men and women. I should drop quietly away.

CROKER.

Would you?

FANNY.

Goodness knows I'm not strait-laced, Croker; but one daren't let one's laces get too slack. [*Sadly.*] Yes, I should simply have to drop away quietly. What an end——!

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Don't let us talk in this fashion.

FANNY.

[*Rousing herself.*] No, no. [*Recovering her spirits.*] As a matter of fact, your homily has comforted me tremendously—though you did snarl at me like a griffin.

CROKER.

[*Laughing.*] Ha, ha, ha!

FANNY.

But you don't object to my whispering just *one* word of warning into that little pink ear of hers, when an opportunity occurs, eh?

CROKER.

On the contrary——

AUREA.

[*Looking in at the further window.*] She is coming, aunt.

[AUREA *disappears quickly. One of the caged birds bursts into song.*]

FANNY.

Hark!

CROKER.

[*On the left.*] Eh?

FANNY.

Listen to that silly bird. It's the same with me—always has been; my heart thumps—thumps—thumps—whenever she approaches. And with you?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] Yes. What is she looking like?

FANNY.

Oh, fresher for the soft air of this place—more colour.

CROKER.

Her paleness is wonderfully becoming, though.

FANNY.

[*Smiling.*] When you met her at St. Moritz, did you notice she had lost some of those little lines we saw last season?

CROKER.

They were going. [*Regretfully.*] I missed them. They were nothing but dimples.

FANNY.

And her smile—[*Breaking off suddenly and coming to him.*] Croker——

CROKER.

Yes?

FANNY.

[*Her troubled manner returning.*] I'll tell you what she looks like—[*irritably*] what a noise that bird makes! I'll tell you; I should describe her as looking exactly like—[*with an uncomfortable laugh*] it's the effect of this enchanted lake, I suppose——

CROKER.

Exactly like——?

FANNY.

[*Again avoiding his eye.*] A bride.

[IRIS *enters at the door, her arm through* AUREA'S. *She is dressed in white, and is happier-looking and more girlish than when last seen.* LAURENCE *follows, carrying his sketch-book.*]

IRIS.

[*Uttering a cry of pleasure upon seeing* CROKER.] Ah! [*Kissing* FANNY.] Dear Fanny! [*Advancing to* CROKER *with extended hands.*] Aurea promised me a surprise, but not this!

CROKER.

[*Kissing her hands.*] What are you—the spirit of the lake?

IRIS.

No; something warmer to her friends. The lake is deep and cold, and occasionally cruel.

[FANNY *has greeted* LAURENCE *rather distantly; he now comes to* CROKER.]

CROKER.

[*Shaking hands with him cordially.*] How are you, Mr. Trenwith?

LAURENCE.

[*Brightly.*] When did you come down?

CROKER.

Yesterday.

IRIS.

[*To* CROKER.] Mr. Trenwith is staying at the Britannia. He has been kind enough to let me watch him sketching at Tremezzo this morning. [*Removing her hat and veil with* FANNY'S *assistance.*] And you?

CROKER.

I'm at Menaggio—the Victoria.

IRIS.

A mile away from me. How churlish! [*Laying a hand on* CROKER *and* FANNY.] Still, this is reunion. You'll

all breakfast with me, won't you? Mr. Trenwith has already promised. Yes?

FANNY.

Certainly, dear.

CROKER.

[*Depositing his hat and umbrella upon the settee on the left.*] Glorious! A hundred affirmatives.

AUREA.

[*To* IRIS.] Oh, I'm disgusted! I am engaged to lunch with the Battersbys and to go with them this afternoon, on the steamboat, to the Villa d'Este.

FANNY.

Yes, and I too! But they will readily release an old woman.

AUREA.

[*Referring to her watch.*] I ought to be at the hotel now.

FANNY.

I'll take Aurea back, make my excuses, and return.

CROKER.

[*Taking up his hat and umbrella.*] Let me be your escort.

FANNY.

No, no.

CROKER.

I insist. [*To* IRIS.] At what time do you breakfast?

IRIS.

It shall be delayed till half-past twelve. [*To* AUREA.] You will come to see me again—to-morrow perhaps?

AUREA.

[*Assenting.*] I shall hate the steamboat, and the Villa d'Este, and the Battersbys—and they're such nice people.

FANNY.

[*Going out with* AUREA.] Half-past twelve, then!

CROKER.

[*Following them.*] With the fiercest of appetites.

FANNY *and* CROKER.

Au revoir! [*They depart.*]

IRIS.

[*Pulling the bell-rope which hangs by the door.*] *Au revoir!* [*The* MAN-SERVANT *appears in the doorway.*]

[*To the servant.*] Tell François there will be two more persons for *déjeuner,* and to delay it half-an-hour.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, ma'am.

[*He withdraws, closing the doors.* IRIS *and* LAURENCE *approach each other. They converse in low, tender tones.*]

IRIS.

[*To* LAURENCE.] We lose our *tête-à-tête.* But they are my dearest friends.

LAURENCE.

I understand.

IRIS.

Others may gossip about me, shut their eyes at me eventually if they choose. But these two—I don't believe the comments occasioned by our being so constantly together will ever deprive me of their fidelity, do you?

LAURENCE.

[*Doubtfully.*] I sometimes fear that Miss Sylvain——

IRIS.

[*With a gesture of abandonment.*] Ah! [*Drawing still closer to him.*] Anyhow I have what is most precious. [*Indicating the sketch-book which he retains in his hand.*] Show me your morning's work.

LAURENCE.

[*Exhibiting a page deprecatingly.*] There's little to show.

IRIS.

For shame! And I was reading intently nearly the whole of the time in order not to distract you.

LAURENCE.

True—but my eyes were wandering towards your face nearly the whole of the time.

IRIS.

How foolish! Were they? [*In his ear.*] I know they were.

[*With a childlike laugh of pleasure she flings her hat away from her, in the direction of the settee by the further window, and sinks on to the cushions on the left. The hat falls upon the floor; he picks it up.*]

IRIS.

[*Carelessly.*] Oh, my pretty hat! [*Seeing that he is concerned over its trimmings.*] It's of no consequence.

LAURENCE.

[*Placing the hat and his sketch-book upon the writing-table.*] It is one of the hats that came from Paris yesterday.

IRIS.

[*Taking the guitar upon her lap.*] Is it? So it is.

[*She thumbs the guitar. He comes to her slowly, contemplating her with a troubled look.*]

LAURENCE.

Dearest——

IRIS.

Eh? Where's your mandoline?

LAURENCE.

I left it in the garden last night, I'm afraid.

IRIS.

Careless person! Send for it.

LAURENCE.

[*Sitting in the chair which is near her.*] Dearest, tell me—have you always been as I have known you?

IRIS.

Always—as you have known me—?

LAURENCE.

Profuse—extravagant—?

IRIS.

I? Oh, yes, always; from childhood, I've been told. Why? You have asked me something to that effect before, Laurie.

LAURENCE.

Forgive me.

IRIS.

Yes, it's in my blood, the very core of my nature, I believe.

LAURENCE.

[*Thoughtfully.*] To be lavish—reckless——

IRIS.

Reckless? You said extravagant.

LAURENCE.

Is there much difference?

IRIS.

Between recklessness and mere personal extravagance—indulgence? Oh, yes, indeed, indeed. There is courage in recklessness—blind courage, but courage; an absence of calculation, no thought of self whatever. And recklessness implies energy, determination, of a kind. But I—your poor Iris——! Do fetch your mandoline.

LAURENCE.

No, no; talk about yourself.

IRIS.

Your poor, weak, sordid Iris, who must lie in the sun in summer, before the fire in winter, who must wear the choicest lace, the richest furs; whose eyes must never encounter any but the most beautiful objects—languid, slothful, nerveless, incapable almost of effort! Do you remember the story of the poet Thomson, and the peaches? He adored peaches, but was too greedy to await their appearance at table and too indolent to pluck them himself; so he used to stand propped-up against the wall upon which they grew and, with half-closed lids, bite into his beloved fruit as it hung from its tree. [*Plaintively.*] Ha, ha, ha! No image could give you a better notion of my habits and disposition.

LAURENCE.

Dearest, you blacken yourself wilfully.

IRIS.

Reckless! reckless! Why, were I a reckless woman, Laurie, we should now be man and wife, should we not?

LAURENCE.

[*In low, earnest tones, bending over her.*] Man and wife.

IRIS.

[*Wistfully, looking into space.*] Man and wife.

LAURENCE.

Man and wife! married! no one in the world to look askance at us!

IRIS.

Yes, we should have hurried off to church and begged a clergyman to turn a rich woman into a pauper; and you would have been saddled with a helpless doll stripped of her gewgaws and finery—if I had been simply reckless.

LAURENCE.

We should have been happy, dearest; we should have been happy.

IRIS.

[*Incredulously.*] Even then?

LAURENCE.

[*Eagerly.*] Even then.

IRIS.

[*Catching a little of his eagerness.*] What! happier, do you think, than we are merely as lovers?

LAURENCE.

I believe so; in spite of your mistrust of yourself, I believe so.

IRIS.

[*Relapsing into languor, her fingers straying over the strings of the guitar.*] Oh, of course I know it would have been better for our souls could I have grappled with the

problem honestly and courageously—married you and gone out to—what is the name of the place——?

LAURENCE.

River Ranche—Chilcoten——

IRIS.

That, or parted from you for ever. But, you see, I hadn't the recklessness on the one hand nor the power of self-denial on the other. And so I treat your love as the poet did the fruit—I steal it; greedily and lazily I steal it. [*Laying her guitar aside with a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah—h—h! However, we're contented as we are, aren't we? [*Closing her eyes.*] I am; I am.

[*They remain silent for a few moments, he staring at the floor with knitted brows. Suddenly she puts her hair back from her forehead and rises.*]

IRIS.

Phew! it's very oppressive this morning.

[*She passes him, walking away towards the right and there standing idly.*]

LAURENCE.

[*After a pause, heavily.*] Dearest——

IRIS.

Laurie?

LAURENCE.

Naturally you wonder why I am continually catechising you about yourself.

IRIS.

You enjoy diving down into the depths of my character —is that it? Cruel, when they are such shallow little depths! [*Pitifully.*] The process disturbs the surface of me —makes ripples, as it were.

LAURENCE.

[*Rising and going to her.*] Yes, my persistency must seem terribly ill-bred. [*Hesitatingly.*] But it's all part of my anxiety concerning the future.

IRIS.

The future?

LAURENCE.

Our future.

IRIS.

Why, what is on your mind?

LAURENCE.

[*Gently.*] Iris, things can't continue as they are.

IRIS.

[*With a note of alarm in her voice.*] Eh? What has happened?

LAURENCE.

[*Soothingly.*] Nothing—nothing. Only—I hate to be obliged to talk to you in this strain—I have to deal with the old question once more.

IRIS.

The old question?

LAURENCE.

A means of livelihood.

IRIS.

[*With wide-open eyes.*] A means of livelihood!

LAURENCE.

You remember that when, six weeks ago, I wrote to my uncle, telling him I was hanging-up for a while the idea of leaving England, he sent me, generously enough, his good wishes and a cheque for five hundred pounds?

IRIS.

Yes.

LAURENCE.

At the same time his letter conveyed a very decided intimation that I was neither to see him nor hear from him again.

IRIS.

I read Archdeacon Standish's note.

LAURENCE.

It is evident I can look for nothing further in that direction.

IRIS.

Quite. What does that matter?

LAURENCE.

[*Avoiding her gaze.*] Therefore, those five hundred pounds—or, rather, what remains of them—represent all I have with which to——

IRIS.

To——?

LAURENCE.

To commence operations.

IRIS.

Operations?

LAURENCE.

Work.

IRIS.

Where?

LAURENCE.

Out there.

IRIS.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Laurie!

LAURENCE.

Through my delay I have lost the chance of taking over Eardley's ranche at Chilcoten, even if I possessed the capital. But the other scheme remains.

IRIS.

The other?

LAURENCE.

Joining Fred Bagot. He's five-and-twenty miles nearer the Soda Creek, you know, where there's a post-office and all sorts of civilisation. I could pay him the premium he asks—two hundred and fifty—and peg away with a view to a partnership. The second plan might prove as good in the end as the original one.

IRIS.

[*Breathlessly.*] Laurie!

LAURENCE.

Dearest!

IRIS.

Laurie, why are you teasing me?

LAURENCE.

Teasing you?

IRIS.

Reviving the notion of that terrible ranche!

LAURENCE.

Iris, it is the one career I am fitted for. I should succeed at it; I feel I should succeed at it.

IRIS.

But there is no longer any necessity for it! The project belongs to the past! [*He attempts to speak; she interrupts him.*] Oh, we have hitherto avoided the subject of money matters, Laurence—it is such a distasteful topic as between

you and me. Dear, you shall never again have the smallest care about money; I want you to regard your embarrassments as absolutely at an end. It is unkind of you to have kept your anxieties from me in this way.

LAURENCE.

Iris—Iris—you don't understand.

IRIS.

What else—?

LAURENCE.

You don't understand that a man—some men, at least; I among the number—can't accept money from a woman.

IRIS.

[*Blankly.*] Why not?

LAURENCE.

Become dependent upon a woman! [*Walking away and sitting upon the settee by the nearer window.*] Live upon a woman!

IRIS.

[*Following him and standing at the back of the settee.*] But—the circumstances——! We love each other.

LAURENCE.

[*With clenched hands.*] Does that make the situation easier for me? Iris, the position would be intolerable.

IRIS.

No, no.

LAURENCE.

Intolerable. Intolerable.

[*She leaves him and wanders away to the breakfast-table, where she sits plucking at the leaves of some of the flowers which decorate the table. He rises,*

walks to the further window, looks out, and then joins her.]

LAURENCE.

[*Remorsefully.*] I know I'm cruel, dearest. But it's of a piece with the rest of my behaviour; I've been cruel to you from the very beginning.

IRIS.

Never till now.

LAURENCE.

Yes, I ought to have been strong; I ought to have constituted myself your protector. I ought to have said goodbye to you finally on the night of your dinner-party.

IRIS.

I forgive you all that. That was my fault. But now——!

LAURENCE.

[*Partly to himself.*] One could have done it if one had chosen. I simply allowed the current to carry both of us away.

IRIS.

Why should we try to escape from the current? We love each other; we've been happy; we *are* happy. Why aren't you satisfied to be one of my birds—oh, but my best, my most dearly prized? Just for a scruple——!

LAURENCE.

Scruple!

IRIS.

[*Suddenly.*] Laurence, directly we return to London I will see Archie Kane and insist upon his obtaining some suitable occupation for you in town. I will! He and I have already talked over the matter. He mentioned a secretaryship as being possible.

LAURENCE.

I know—the sort of billet that provides a man with gloves and cab fares, and a flower for his coat! [*Entreatingly.*] Iris—Iris, I don't ask you any longer to share the difficulties I must meet with at the outset—a novice starting life on a ranche. But afterwards, when the struggle is over, when affairs settle down into their steady course——!

IRIS.

Their steady course! [*Rising.*] That's it! Their steady course! [*Shudderingly.*] Oh, don't, don't!

[*She goes to the settee by the further window and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows. He follows her.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Standing behind the settee and bending over her.*] Iris! Dearest! Listen! If all went well with me, it wouldn't be hardship and a bare home I could welcome you to. Within a few years there would be comforts, pretty walls to gaze at, servants to wait upon you——!

IRIS.

[*Looking up piteously.*] Two Chinamen—or three? An extra boy to maid me? Oh, Laurie!

LAURENCE.

The Chinese are excellent servants. Eardley describes them in one of his letters——

[*Raising herself so that she kneels upon the settee, she puts her hands upon his shoulders.*]

IRIS.

Another time! Let us discuss the point thoroughly another time. Laurie! Another time!

LAURENCE.

When?

IRIS.

When we leave here. We are happy. Look! how blue the sky and the lake are! Dear, life will never be quite like this again. After we have left this place!

LAURENCE.

[*Irresolutely.*] If I say Yes——?

IRIS.

[*With a cry of delight.*] Ah!

LAURENCE.

[*Warningly.*] Dearest, your term here expires in a fortnight.

IRIS.

I can continue it for another month.

LAURENCE.

Another month——!

IRIS.

Hush! hush! you have promised. I have your promise; I have your promise——

[*There is the sound of voices in the distance.*]

IRIS.

[*Releasing him and listening.*] Fanny and Croker! [*Pressing her hands to her eyes.*] My face——!

[*She goes out quickly, at the door. He walks about in thought, his head bowed, his hands deep in his pockets. Coming upon the guitar, he picks it up, sits, and twangs its strings discordantly. At length, the voices growing nearer, he lays the guitar aside*

and interests himself with the magazines. FANNY *and* CROKER *enter at the further window, talking.*]

FANNY.

Yes, quite an unexpected encounter.

CROKER.

Where does he hail from—I didn't gather——?

FANNY.

From Aix. I recognised his back instantly.

CROKER.

You can claim no credit for that; it's the most prosperous-looking back in Europe.

FANNY.

[*To* LAURENCE.] If this invasion continues, Mrs. Bellamy will be driven from Cadenabbia by her friends, Mr. Trenwith.

[IRIS *returns, unnoticed, outwardly composed and placid.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Politely.*] Only by a desire to follow them when they depart. Who is the new arrival, may I ask?

FANNY.

Mr. Frederick Maldonado.

IRIS.

Ah! [*They all turn towards her.*] Of whom are you talking?

FANNY.

Our great friend—in every sense of the word—Freddy Maldonado.

CROKER.

We met him a few minutes ago in the hall of the Belle Vue.

IRIS.

[*Calmly.*] Oh, yes.

FANNY.

He has just come from Milan. He has been at Aix.

[*The servants enter, carrying a couple of light chairs. They proceed to arrange the two additional places at the table. The doors are left open.*]

IRIS.

[*Advancing.*] Indeed? Is he—well?

FANNY.

If he is, he's far better than he looks. I thought his appearance pretty shocking—didn't you, Croker?

CROKER.

Let me see—did I?

FANNY.

His colour! What does his complexion resemble? I know—that delicious subcutaneous part of a wedding-cake! [*The men laugh.*] And his eyes! I suppose Aix has made him flabby—*I've* never seen such great, heavy—what d'ye call 'em?—pouches as he has under his eyes.

CROKER.

The accumulation of wealth. With him, even nature opens a deposit account.

FANNY.

[*After another laugh.*] Well, what a moral! These are the sights that reconcile one to the possession of a moderate income.

IRIS.

[*In a low voice, looking away.*] Poor Maldo!

FANNY.

Eh? Oh, of course, dear, I exaggerate, as usual. But you'll be able to judge for yourself; his first walk, naturally, will be taken in your direction.

IRIS.

[*Constrainedly.*] I—I hope so. [*Perceiving that the man-servant is waiting to address her.*] Yes?

MAN-SERVANT.

Breakfast, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*At the table.*] Fanny, will you face me? [*To* CROKER, *indicating the chair on her right.*] Croker—[*to* LAURENCE] Mr. Trenwith——

[*They sit*—IRIS *with her back to the further window, the others in the positions assigned to them. The woman-servant, who has previously withdrawn, now returns with a tray of various* hors d'œuvres. *The man takes the tray from her and presents it to those at the table, who help themselves and eat during the talk which follows. The woman retires.*]

IRIS.

This is delightful—delightful—delightful.

CROKER.

Beyond measure, dear lady.

IRIS.

Ah, but to have you and Fanny with me in these sweet surroundings!

[CROKER *raises her hand to his lips chivalrously.*]

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] Faithful One!

FANNY.

[*Taking* IRIS'S *disengaged hand, across the table.*] Divinity!

IRIS.

Dear Fanny! [*Looking at those around her, with a little sigh.*] Ah, how many real, close friends can one hope to carry through life, if one is lucky, in spite of one's imperfections and infirmities! Has it ever been estimated?

FANNY.

Oh, yes—as many as you can count upon the fingers of your two hands, we are told.

LAURENCE.

Upon one hand would be a closer computation, I fancy.

CROKER.

You're right, Mr. Trenwith—barring the thumb.

IRIS.

That, at least, allows me four. I have three here.

LAURENCE.

You are very kind——

IRIS.

Ah, but remember, you are only a cadet, Mr. Trenwith. Mr. Harrington and Miss Sylvain are fully graduated.

LAURENCE.

I am honoured by the humblest position assigned to me.

FANNY.

There is still one finger unprovided for. Who is to be the fourth—the faithful fourth?

CROKER.

[*To* IRIS.] Yes, whom would you elect to accompany us three to the vale of grey hairs and rheumatism?

IRIS.

[*Reflecting.*] Whom——?

FANNY.

Freddy Maldonado?

[IRIS *is silent, looking down upon her plate.*]

CROKER.

Archie Kane?

FANNY.

Dear old Archie!

[*The woman-servant enters with some letters and newspapers. She lays them on the table at* IRIS'S *side and, taking the tray from the man, goes out. The man employs himself at the sideboard in mixing a salad.*]

IRIS.

[*To the woman.*] Thanks. [*To those at the table, apologetically.*] It is a habit of mine, when I am abroad, to clutch at my letters directly they arrive.

FANNY.

Unwise! You may find a bill—a heavy one.

IRIS.

Ha, ha!

CROKER.

A splendid corrective—the skeleton at the feast!

IRIS.

Let us drown the thought. Fanny drinks white wine, Croker. That water is Mattoni.

[CROKER *helps* FANNY *to wine from a decanter which has been transferred from the sideboard to the table.*]

IRIS.

[*Passing a decanter of red wine to* LAURENCE.] Mr. Trenwith——?

LAURENCE.

[*Taking up the decanter.*] May I——?

IRIS.

[*Pushing her glass towards him.*] A little. [*Observing the newspapers.*] The papers. I wonder whether the gossip contains news of poor Mrs. Wynning. [*Selecting a newspaper and handing it to* CROKER.] Do look, Croker.

CROKER.

Certainly.

[*He tears off the wrapper and opens the paper. The woman-servant returns, carrying a dish of mayonnaise of fish which she deposits upon the sideboard. The man removes from the table the plates which have been used and replaces them with others. The woman again withdraws.*]

FANNY.

Mrs. Wynning?

IRIS.

Haven't you heard? She was thrown from her dog-cart last week.

FANNY.

Oh!

IRIS.

She had driven to the station at Champness to meet her husband. Her horse wasn't broken to trains, evidently, and bolted.

FANNY.

She is badly hurt?

IRIS.

Terribly bruised and shaken, I fear. [*To* CROKER.] Is there a paragraph?

CROKER.

[*Turning the paper.*] Not in the middle of the paper. There may be a footnote——

[*His eye is arrested by some matter in the paper and he reads silently and absorbedly.*]

IRIS.

[*Watching him.*] There *is* an announcement.

CROKER.

Y-yes.

IRIS.

[*Apprehensively.*] Not reassuring? [*After a pause.*] Croker!

CROKER.

Extraordinary. Extraordinary.

FANNY.

Extraordinary?

[*Leaning towards him, she discovers the item of news which interests him.*]

FANNY.

[*Breathlessly.*] Croker!

[*The man-servant hands the dish of mayonnaise to* IRIS.]

FANNY.

[*In a strange voice.*] Iris, dear, let us be alone for a few moments.

IRIS.

[*To the servant.*] I'll ring.

[*The man places the dish before* IRIS *and leaves the room, partially shutting the doors. Directly he has disappeared,* FANNY *goes to the doors and completely closes them.* IRIS *and* LAURENCE *rise from the table.*]

IRIS.

Croker!

CROKER.

[*Calmly.*] Yes, most extraordinary.

IRIS.

[*Looking over his shoulder.*] What——?

CROKER.

[*Rising and moving away.*] But there is nothing in it, I am convinced. It must be an error—a gross libel——

IRIS.

Libel—upon whom?

FANNY.

[*Coming to her.*] Archie—Archie Kane!

IRIS.

Archie——?

FANNY.

Read it aloud, Croker.

CROKER.

No, no, I can't credit anything of the kind. Don't be alarmed, I pray.

[FANNY *goes to him and takes the paper out of his hand.*]

FANNY.

[*Reading.*] "The disquieting rumours which have recently been current concerning the sudden disappearance of a well-known London solicitor are unhappily substantiated by a statement formally issued yesterday by Mr. James Woodroffe, of the firm of Woodroffe & Kane of 71 Lincoln's Inn Fields. From this document it transpires that the missing gentleman is Mr. Woodroffe's partner—Mr. Archibald Sidmouth Kane—and its frank avowals afford too much reason to fear that the books of the firm will be found to furnish yet another lamentable instance of the injudicious confidence of clients." [*There is a pause; then, in a mechanical way,* FANNY *resumes.*] "Some sympathy is, however, claimed for Mr. Woodroffe, whose indifferent health for the past two years has unfitted him for business, and who has, in consequence, been induced to leave affairs in the complete control of his partner. Mr. Archibald Kane resided in Upper Brook Street and was exceedingly popular in London society." [*Looking from one to the other.*] Eh—well?

CROKER.

I repeat, I can't credit it.

FANNY.

That he has disappeared?

CROKER.

That he's a rogue.

FANNY.

[*Faintly.*] Mr. Woodroffe's statement! And no newspaper would risk——

CROKER.

You have some other papers there.

[*Two newspapers remain upon the table.* LAURENCE *hands them to* IRIS, *who passes them to* FANNY. FANNY *gives one to* CROKER *and retains the other, and they proceed to remove the wrappers. As they do so, they exchange glances, and then, together, look at* IRIS, *who is now sitting, on the left of the table, with her face averted.*]

FANNY.

Iris!

IRIS.

Yes, dear?

FANNY.

Was another trustee to your husband's will ever appointed in Tom Cautherley's place?

IRIS.

No. It has been talked about. Some names are under consideration. Archie is the only trustee at present.

[*Again* FANNY'S *eyes meet* CROKER'S, *and there is a further pause.* LAURENCE *goes out on to the balcony.*]

FANNY.

[*To* CROKER.] You—you were in his hands?

CROKER.

[*With a nod and a smile.*] H'm. And you?

[*She raises her arms slightly and lets them fall.* IRIS *rises.*]

IRIS.

[*In level tones.*] I entirely agree with Croker—we are upsetting ourselves quite needlessly. Dear Fanny, you know Archie—we all know Archie—too well to—[*Walking about the room.*] There will be an explanation. This Mr. Woodroffe! A case, perhaps, of a quarrel between partners. As for my own concerns, of course a fresh trustee ought to have been appointed at once when Mr. Cautherley died. [*Pressing her fingers to her temples.*] Why hasn't it been seen to? Other interests are involved. *I* must see to it when I go back.

[*While* IRIS *is talking and pacing the room,* FANNY *and* CROKER *open and anxiously search the other newspapers; she sitting on the left of the breakfast-table, he by the lower window.*]

CROKER.

Substantially, the same report is in this paper.

FANNY.

I can find nothing. Your letters, Iris! Have you received any letter——?

IRIS.

[*Examining her letters.*] No. [*With a smile.*] As you were saying—tradesmen's accounts. [*Surveying the breakfast-table and then looking at the others.*] Our unfortunate little *déjeuner!*

FANNY.

[*Energetically.*] We mustn't sit here. [*Jumping up.*] We must send a telegram—a wire to London!

CROKER.

[*Throwing his newspaper aside and rising with alacrity.*] Yes.

FANNY.

Let us get the report confirmed, at any rate.

CROKER.

Contradicted, we hope.

FANNY.

To whom can we——?

CROKER.

Leave that to me. [*To* IRIS.] May I be excused?

[*She again smiles, in assent, and he seizes his hat and umbrella and comes to her.* FANNY *sits, on the left, resuming her search in the newspaper.*]

CROKER.

Divinity, some day we shall enjoy a hearty laugh at the recollection of this scare. A scare—nothing else, take my word for it. Ah, yes, your charming breakfast! You will invite me on another occasion? [*Bending over her hand, a suspicion of a tremor in his voice.*] Many—many thanks.

[*He goes out at the door. She walks, aimlessly, to the middle of the room.*]

FANNY.

[*Turning.*] Croker, if you meet little Aurea, don't breathe a word—[*following him*] Croker! Let the child have her afternoon's pleasure undisturbed——!

[*She disappears. The doors are left open.* LAURENCE, *seeing that* IRIS *is alone, comes to her side. They speak in hushed voices.*]

LAURENCE.

Iris!

IRIS.

[*Impassively.*] Yes?

LAURENCE.

This man, Kane? Can it be that he's a scoundrel? Is it possible?

IRIS.

No—*im*possible, *im*possible.

LAURENCE.

And yet—suppose—suppose——?

IRIS.

What?

LAURENCE.

Suppose he *has* been tampering—speculating——?

IRIS.

[*Tremblingly.*] With my fortune?

LAURENCE.

[*Eloquently.*] Ah, my dearest! my dearest!

IRIS.

[*Looking at him steadily, with a queer little twist of her mouth.*] Yes—after all—after everything—wouldn't it be —droll?

[FANNY'S *voice is heard, calling.*]

FANNY.

[*In the hall.*] Iris!

IRIS.

Eh?

FANNY.

Iris—a friend!

[LAURENCE *retreats from her side, as* MALDONADO *enters.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Advancing.*] Pardon. I am very unceremonious. Miss Sylvain——

[*He breaks off. There is a moment of constraint on her part, then she extends her hand to him.*]

IRIS.

[*Almost inaudibly.*] Maldo——!

[*The curtain falls.*]

END OF THE SECOND ACT.

THE THIRD ACT

The scene is that of the preceding act. It is night-time. Without, the lake sparkles under a full moon, while the lights of Bellagio cluster brightly at the water's edge. Within the room there is an air of preparation for the departure of its tenant. The druggets are removed, and the statuary, curtains, candelabra, and much of the furniture are in holland wrappers. One of the settees is pushed against the wall on the left—some footstools are piled upon it; and between the middle window and the further window are two chairs, the one on top of the other. Two bottles of champagne and some glasses are upon the table on which breakfast was served in the previous act. On the left of this table is the other settee, on its right a chair. The writing-table now stands out in the left-centre of the room, facing the lower and middle windows. A chair is before it, and near at hand is a wooden packing-case. The lid of the packing-case is open, and the guitar and a quantity of books and music are seen to have been carelessly thrown in.

The birds have disappeared from the balcony; a single bird-cage, covered with baize, stands upon one of the cabinets. The room is lighted by oil lamps.

[FANNY SYLVAIN, *with a set face, deep in thought, is seated upon the settee in the centre of the room. She is in semi-toilette and has a lace scarf upon her shoulders. There is the faint sound of distant music. The double-doors open and* CROKER HARRINGTON, *in travelling dress, is shown in by the man-servant.*]

CROKER.

[*To the man.*] Please let Mrs. Bellamy know that I have just arrived.

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. 'Arrington—yes, sir.

[*The servant withdraws, closing the doors.* FANNY *rises and shakes hands with* CROKER *heartily.*]

FANNY.

Ah!

CROKER.

My dear Fanny!

FANNY.

Dear Croker! Have you had a pleasant journey?

CROKER.

[*With a wry face.*] Pleasant!

FANNY.

How's London?

CROKER.

[*Placing his hat upon the writing-table and taking off his gloves.*] Crowded.

FANNY.

What, in the first week in October?

CROKER.

Oh, under normal conditions I daresay I should have regarded it as a deserted village. But when a man is down, and desires to hide his head——

FANNY.

The pavement sprouts acquaintances.

CROKER.

Precisely.

FANNY.

[*Laying a hand upon his arm.*] No good news, then?

CROKER.

[*Shaking his head.*] I might have spared myself the trouble——

FANNY.

You undertook it for our sakes as well as for your own. I meant—no good news for yourself? We know *our* fate.

CROKER.

You do?

FANNY.

We have been in communication with the people who are engaged in examining the affairs of the wretched Woodroffe. [*With a gesture of despair.*] Oh, it's awful!

CROKER.

[*Putting his gloves in his hat as an excuse for turning away.*] I am glad it doesn't fall to my lot to break the worst to you.

FANNY.

I've been robbed of every shilling, Croker.

CROKER.

And I.

FANNY.

All gone—every penny.

CROKER.

Every cent—red or otherwise.

FANNY.

Where's that beast?

CROKER.

Archie?

FANNY.

Puh!

CROKER.

He's known to have reached America.

FANNY.

What has America done?

CROKER.

Poor devil!

FANNY.

Devil.

CROKER.

It was the collapse of this so-called Universal Finance Corporation that overwhelmed him, it appears. He was deep in it.

FANNY.

And we thought him a solid, cautious creature——!

CROKER.

We were gulls. At the end he made a desperate effort to save the concern, I hear—and with *her* money.

FANNY.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Oh! Where was he last seen?

CROKER.

At a theatre, complaining of the quality of the music played during an *entr'acte*.

FANNY.

If he'd only had the common decency to shoot himself! Good heavens, and I'm thirty, Croker!

CROKER.

I'm nearly forty.

FANNY.

And I'm losing my looks!

CROKER.

And I'm not.

FANNY.

Ha, ha, ha! You—you—you foolish——[*Hiding her face upon his shoulder for a moment, then lifting her head cheerily and brushing her tears away.*] Excuse me for compromising you. You'll take your coat off? She will be down in a few minutes.

CROKER.

[*Depositing his coat and hat upon the settee on the left.*] Have you formed any plans yet?

FANNY.

Aurea and I go up to Scotland for a month or so, to relations—to enable us to "look round," as they express it. Perhaps you can explain the process of "looking round" in the midst of a circle of solemn relatives.

CROKER.

[*Returning to her.*] Oh, you talk in a low key, and play Halma in the evening, and get to bed early.

FANNY.

Ha! And you?

CROKER.

One of the men I butted-into in town thinks I would make an ideal secretary for a new club about to be started in Piccadilly.

FANNY.

What is an ideal club-secretary?

CROKER.

A fellow who sees that the members have every opportunity for grumbling, and no cause. [*The music ceases; he goes to the further window, which is open, and looks out.*] Thank goodness, that wretched band is silent!

FANNY.

Your musical taste is as fastidious as Mr. Kane's. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Fancy! for the remainder of one's life, if one lives to be a hundred, moonlight, a still, luscious evening, the sound of music—always to remind one of ruin!

CROKER.

[*Coming to her and leaning over her chair, softly.*] Fanny.

FANNY.

Yes?

CROKER.

How does she bear it?

FANNY.

Splendidly.

CROKER.

Ah!

FANNY.

I've loved her, as you know, for years, intensely; but I am *proud* of her now. Her whole nature seems to have expanded, Croker—become greater, nobler.

CROKER.

[*Tenderly.*] The capacity was there; it only needed this.

FANNY.

Luckily she doesn't come off quite as deplorably as you and I—our poor Divinity. Her new man of business be-

lieves he'll manage to salvage about a hundred-and-fifty a year for her out of the wreck.

CROKER.

[*Wincing.*] Tsch! I hoped——

FANNY.

It *would* have been more, but it turns out that she's heavily in debt, dear thing.

CROKER.

He never curbed her.

FANNY.

Kane? Not he! Tempted her, I suspect—[*starting up furiously*] professed to be discharging her bills while he was embezzling the money, I shouldn't wonder.

CROKER.

[*Soothingly.*] No, no; give the devil his due.

FANNY.

[*Her fingers twitching.*] If I could! if I could! [*Calming herself as she walks about the room.*] And so the lease of her house in London, her pictures and furniture, jewels, plate—they have all to be thrown into the pot; and she's left with the few louis she has in her *porte-monnaie* and the prospect of this miserable hundred-and-fifty a year.

CROKER.

But her friends——!

FANNY.

She won't accept a sou from a living soul, she declares. [*Setting herself upon the settee in the centre.*] That's where she's so fine. She *will* live upon three paltry pounds a week. She!

CROKER.

[*Standing beside her, with a confident smile.*] Ah, for the present. But, my dear Fanny, one isn't resigning oneself to the secretaryship of a Piccadilly club for the rest of existence. [*Going to the back of the settee and bending over it—speaking almost into her ear.*] I, too, intend to "look round." And by-and-by—you and she—my playmates—companions with me in this mud-puddle game of life, in which we have all got seriously splashed——

FANNY.

[*Abruptly.*] Ah, stop—of course, you've been away—you haven't heard——!

CROKER.

What?

FANNY.

She has definitely engaged herself to young Trenwith.

CROKER.

[*Standing upright.*] Ah!

FANNY.

At a moment when a man with even a moderate position in the world——! But, there, she's given her heart to him, and she's full of pluck. God bless her!

[*The distant music is heard again.*]

CROKER.

[*Somewhat huskily.*] God bless them both! He—he's a nice chap. And a fortunate one. [*Sitting in the chair which is behind her, his elbow on the table, his hand shading his face.*] Capital! capital!

[*Struck by his tone, she glances at him and observes his attitude. After a slight pause, she rises and*

moves away to the open window, where she stands looking into the distance.]

FANNY.

[*Gently.*] As you say, Mr. Trenwith is favoured of fortune. But it isn't to be quite yet awhile.

CROKER.

No?

FANNY.

Not for two or three years, I gather. He goes out to a ranche in British Columbia and comes back to fetch her when he has succeeded in making a home for her. He starts for London directly—at something before six to-morrow morning. [*Pointing to the champagne and glasses upon the table.*] Look! you have returned in time to drink the boy's health.

CROKER.

[*Rising, cheerfully.*] Excellent! I'll drain my last bumper of champagne to him, preparatory to taking to club-porter. [*Seriously.*] And she, during his absence——? [*Observing the condition of the room.*] She vacates the Villa Prigno at once, evidently?

FANNY.

She goes into a humble little *Pension* at Tremezzo, for a while.

CROKER.

[*Partially suppressing a groan.*] Oh!

FANNY.

[*Coming to him.*] Yes, she also dates her new life, practically, from to-morrow. I've been upstairs with her, helping her to pack the few plain gowns she is retaining out of her stock.

CROKER.

Why, has her maid——?

FANNY.

Beaumont, her maid, went a week ago. [CROKER *sinks upon the settee, burying his head in his hands.*] Oh, my dear man, don't groan. Our Divinity! to see her on her knees among her trunks, with such a sweet, earnest, helpless, confident look—it's one of the prettiest sights imaginable!

[MALDONADO'S *voice is heard lightly humming an accompaniment to the air played by the band.*]

FANNY.

[*Listening.*] There's Frederick.

CROKER.

[*Looking up.*] Frederick?

FANNY.

Maldonado.

CROKER.

Oh, is he still here?

FANNY.

Yes. He has been so brotherly and sympathetic to us women.

[*She goes to the window and meets* MALDONADO. MALDONADO *is in evening dress and is smoking. Notwithstanding the changes in his appearance suggested by* FANNY *in the previous act, he appears to be in excellent spirits.*]

FANNY.

Good evening, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

[*On the balcony.*] What a perfect night, eh? I've bestowed a few extra francs upon those fellows playing outside the Belle Vue. We will celebrate our young friend's leave-taking with musical honours.

FANNY.

Here's Croker.

MALDONADO.

[*Entering the room.*] The traveller returned! [*Coming to* CROKER.] My dear boy!

CROKER.

[*Shaking hands with him without rising.*] Hullo, Freddy!

MALDONADO.

I am still kicking my heels about the verge of this monotonous pond. [*Observing that* FANNY *has gone out upon the balcony—lowering his voice.*] One's heart bleeds for these ladies. And yet they both—with the characteristic obstinacy of their sex—decline to avail themselves of my poor services. How goes it? Your visit to London has not proved too satisfactory?

CROKER.

Quite the reverse. Oh, except that I'm likely to take the secretaryship of the new club Bulkeley is promoting.

MALDONADO.

No!

CROKER.

Hope you'll come in.

MALDONADO.

[*With a protesting shrug.*] My dear, good Croker, we

are pals of some years' standing, you and I—need I say more? Dooce take Bulkeley and his club!

CROKER.

[*Rising.*] Freddy!

MALDONADO.

[*Grandly.*] Pish! not a word. Pray write me a line.

CROKER.

[*With feeling.*] Thanks, old man. I haven't reached that stage yet—never shall, I trust. [*Gripping* MALDONADO'S *hand.*] But—thanks, old man.

[FANNY *returns to the room. The music ceases.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Gently shaking* CROKER *by the shoulder.*] Confound you, you are as perverse as our fair friends—what! [*Breaking off upon perceiving* FANNY *and walking away.*] I observe the banquet is prepared, my dear Fanny. [*Throwing his hat upon the writing-table.*] Where are the principal figures?

FANNY.

I think I've just seen Mr. Trenwith in the garden.

MALDONADO.

[*Slightly unpleasantly.*] Ho! Is he meditating a parting serenade under Iris's window? [*Imitating the playing of a guitar.*] R-r-rhm! r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm, r-r-rhm—tum, tum! He touches the guitar most gracefully.

FANNY.

[*Sitting at the table on the right.*] The mandolins. Don't be unfeeling, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

Unfeeling! I! When I am here to join the general tearful farewell. [*To* CROKER.] You've heard the great news?

CROKER.

[*Again seated upon the settee.*] Just heard it.

MALDONADO.

[*Carelessly examining a photograph of* LAURENCE *which he takes from the writing-table.*] And haven't I pledged myself to rise at an unconscionably early hour to-morrow morning, in order that I may escort this lucky young gentleman to the steamboat and report upon the final incidents of his departure? You'll assist, Croker?

CROKER.

With pleasure.

MALDONADO.

No, upon second thought, I decline to share the privilege. I hold the commission direct from Iris, and I claim the right of executing it unaccompanied.

[LAURENCE, *wearing a suit of blue serge, appears upon the balcony.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Laying the photograph aside.*] Yes, here is the hero of the occasion. We are talking about you, my dear Laurence.

LAURENCE.

[*Entering the room.*] Are you? [*To* CROKER, *who advances to meet him.*] Mr. Harrington! [*They shake hands.*] I'm glad you're back in time to give me a parting shake of the hand.

CROKER.

Trenwith, I congratulate you, from the bottom of my heart.

LAURENCE.

[*With feeling.*] Isn't it—isn't it jolly?

[IRIS *enters quietly, closing the door after her. She is plainly dressed, without ornament of any kind. Her face is somewhat wan, her eyes red, her manner very gentle and subdued; but her whole appearance and bearing express a spirit of happiness and resolve.* FANNY *rises, and the men, hearing* IRIS *enter, turn silently towards her. She advances to* CROKER.]

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] Dear Croker——

CROKER.

The bad penny!

IRIS.

With no satisfactory news of your affairs?

CROKER.

I'm all right—a bachelor—whose hat covers his kingdom. What about yourself?

[LAURENCE *is on her other side; she lays a hand upon his arm.*]

IRIS.

[*To* CROKER.] They have told you——?

CROKER.

[*With a nod.*] I've returned in the nick of time, eh?

IRIS.

I should always have grieved if you had not been with us to-night. You congratulate us?

CROKER.

[*Smiling at Laurence.*] I've already patted *him* on the back.

LAURENCE.

That he has!

IRIS.

Give *me* your good wishes.

CROKER.

[*A break in his voice.*] Oh, my dear——!

[*Stooping a little, she invites him to kiss her brow.*]

CROKER.

[*His lips touching her forehead.*] I congratulate you.

IRIS.

[*Going to* MALDONADO.] Good evening, Maldo. We have dragged you away from the dinner-table. [*Surveying the table on the right, happily.*] Look at our modest preparations—the last of my excesses! After to-night—[*Going to the settee in the centre and speaking, across the table, to* FANNY.] Fanny, ask Henry to give us our wine. Croker——

[FANNY *goes out at the door.* IRIS *sits upon the settee and* CROKER *comes to her side.* MALDONADO *and* LAURENCE—MALDONADO'S *arm round* LAURENCE'S *shoulder—move away to the open window. The music is resumed.*]

IRIS.

[*To* CROKER.] You have heard everything from Fanny, Faithful One?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] You are moving on to Tremezzo, I understand?

IRIS.

To-morrow morning, early, [*closing her eyes*] directly I hear that I am alone—that *he* has gone. [*Recovering*

herself.] I shall remain there for a few weeks—the *Pension* is moderately clean and pleasant—and then transfer myself to another cheap place, Varese perhaps. [*With enthusiasm.*] As long as I avoid heavy travelling-expenses, I shall manage admirably, admirably.

CROKER.

[*Compassionately.*] You are like a child with a new toy, Divinity.

IRIS.

[*Reproachfully.*] Croker! Poverty—a new toy!

CROKER.

A new experience, at any rate. [*Earnestly.*] Are you sure you are justified in imposing this ordeal upon yourself?

IRIS.

Ordeal?

CROKER.

This life of mean economy.

IRIS.

It is imposed upon me by circumstances.

CROKER.

They can be lightened by friends. It is maddening to reflect that I am useless to you at such a crisis; but there are dozens of other people who are attached to you—Freddy Maldonado——

IRIS.

No, no. [*In an altered tone.*] Croker—[*He seats himself beside her, on her left.*] Dear, dear friend, I—I want to tell you—[*dropping her voice.*] I welcome this change in my fortunes; I welcome it.

CROKER.

Welcome it!

IRIS.

I have deserved it, Croker. I regard it as my proper penalty, my scourge.

CROKER.

Scourge! for what, in heaven's name?

IRIS.

[*Evasively.*] Oh, do you imagine a woman can be as self-centred as I have been, pamper herself as I have done, without meriting chastisement?

CROKER.

You are a good woman, to receive your reverses in this spirit.

IRIS.

[*Drawing a deep breath.*] Am I? There can be nothing very meritorious in accepting resignedly that which gives me self-respect, makes me worthier of Laurence, equips me for the future I am one day to share with him. [*Shaking her head.*] It is only another—a better—form of selfishness. Oh, but I feel so much happier; so much happier!

CROKER.

[*Patting her hand*] And to-morrow——?

IRIS.

To-morrow I actually enter into my new being. To-morrow!

[FANNY *returns, followed by the man-servant, who proceeds to open one of the bottles of champagne and to fill the glasses.* IRIS *rises and, going to the open window, speaks to* LAURENCE *and* MALDONADO,

who are now upon the balcony. FANNY *joins* CROKER.]

IRIS.

[*To* FANNY, *as she passes her.*] Thanks, dear Fanny.

FANNY.

[*To* CROKER, *eagerly.*] Has she been talking to you?

CROKER.

Yes.

FANNY.

Well! Am I not right—isn't she noble?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] All conditions of life are relative. For her, this is martyrdom. [*A cork is drawn; he glances over his shoulder, at the table.*] I feel as if I were about to help fire the faggots.

[*He stands with* FANNY *at the table, she on one side, he on the other.* IRIS *brings* LAURENCE *into the room;* MALDONADO *follows them and goes to the table.*]

MALDONADO.

May I have the honour of presiding at these proceedings?

IRIS.

[*Sitting by the writing-table.*] How simple you are, Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Ha! there is a jealous light in our Croker's eye. But I would have him know that the idea of this ceremony originates with me—a stirrup-cup to Mr. Trenwith——!

CROKER.

[*Presenting a glass of champagne to* IRIS.] A stirrup-cup to a traveller by boat and rail! Your metaphor is faulty, Freddy.

MALDONADO.

[*Gaily.*] Hark! he revenges himself upon my metaphors!

[CROKER *walks away towards the open window, laughing.* FANNY *brings a glass of champagne to* LAURENCE, *who is standing at* IRIS'S *side, and returns to the settee. The servant withdraws. The music stops.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Handing a glass of wine to* FANNY.] My dear Fanny——

FANNY.

[*Seating herself upon the settee.*] Thanks, Frederick.

MALDONADO.

[*Giving a glass to* CROKER.] Croker! [*Raising his own glass.*] Our friend, Mr. Trenwith—my dear young companion of the past three weeks—whose departure tomorrow morning is, let us hope, an unerring step towards the brilliant future we desire for him! [*To* LAURENCE, *toasting him.*] Laurence, my dear boy! [*Generally.*] Mr. Trenwith!

[*All, save* LAURENCE, *put their glasses to their lips.*]

MALDONADO.

Yes, a few weeks hence our friend Trenwith embarks upon a career in a distant country, far away—a great deal too far away—from those who, in spite of short acquaintance, have learned to hold him in their esteem, in their affection. [*With a gesture.*] Laurie——

[LAURENCE *advances to* MALDONADO, *who again places an arm round his shoulder.*]

MALDONADO.

You have a stiff time before you, dear boy. But the

thought of the reward awaiting you will put grit into the toiler, carry him lightly over his hundreds of acres, and give ease to his weary limbs at the end of the day. And then, the triumph—hey?—the hour when the victor returns to us; when he claims the prize; when he is in a position to beseech delicate beauty to grace his modest establishment at —what do you call the place?——

FANNY.

Soda Creek.

MALDONADO.

Ha!—and to beg her to transform it, by her presence, into a palace! I drink to that hour and to the lady who inspires the fascinating picture—[*raising his glass again*] the lady who embodies, in her single person, loveliness, virtue, unspeakable charm; whose very name, for those assembled here, is perfume and music combined! Iris!

[*All, except* IRIS, *drink the toast; after which ceremony* FANNY *puts her glass aside and goes to* IRIS *and embraces her.*

LAURENCE.

[*Informally.*] Thank you, Mr. Maldonado. If one has to leave one's friends behind one, there is a grim consolation in knowing that they're such true friends—the best a man ever had.

CROKER.

[*Dryly.*] Freddy, I've never heard you in better form, even at a City banquet.

MALDONADO.

[*Good-humouredly.*] Ha, ha!

IRIS.

[*Going to* MALDONADO *with outstretched hands.*] Thanks, thanks, dear Maldo.

[LAURENCE, IRIS *and* MALDONADO *form a group on the right, talking together.* CROKER *joins* FANNY *on the left.*]

CROKE

[*To* FANNY.] Fanny——

FANNY.

Eh?

CROKER.

Pish! Why need Freddy treat us to that piece of bombast? Of course it isn't so—but he spoke as if he didn't feel a syllable of it.

FANNY.

I agree with you—a few simple words and a handshake——

MALDONADO.

[*Paternally, to* IRIS *and* LAURENCE.] Well! having discharged my duty, and mixed my metaphors, I leave you two young people to yourselves and to the company of the moon.

[CROKER *moves to take up his hat and coat.*]

IRIS.

[*Smiling.*] No, I am going to hand Laurence over to your keeping at once, Maldo.

[CROKER *and* FANNY *look round in surprise.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Also raising his brows.*] At once?

IRIS.

[*Composedly, but with eyes averted.*] You have promised to see him on board the boat in the morning?

MALDONADO.

Oh, yes.

IRIS.

Half-past-five——!

MALDONADO.

Five forty-two, to be precise.

IRIS.

It is very good-natured of you to deprive yourself of your rest.

MALDONADO.

[*Gallantly.*] Ah, for *you*——!

IRIS.

[*Smiling again.*] No, for *him.*

MALDONADO.

But I am to come to you afterwards, to bring you his final message?

IRIS.

[*With an inclination of the head.*] I shall remain here till you have called.

MALDONADO.

[*Bending over her hand.*] Good-night. These are the sad moments of life—but you are brave. That's admirable of you. Good-night.

IRIS.

Good-night, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Taking his hat from the writing-table and shaking hands with* FANNY.] I wish you good-night, dear Fanny.

FANNY.

Good-night, Freddy.

MALDONADO.

[*Shaking hands with* CROKER, *who is again at the further window.*] Good-night, my dear Croker.

CROKER.

Good-night.

MALDONADO.

[*Turning.*] You will find me in the garden, Laurie, sounding your praises to the lizards.

[LAURENCE *waves a hand to him in response and he departs by way of the balcony.* LAURENCE *advances to* FANNY.]

LAURENCE.

[*Simply.*] I want to thank you for your kindness to me, Miss Sylvain.

FANNY.

[*Somewhat remorsefully.*] Ah!

LAURENCE.

Fate is taking you in another direction for a time; but I shall always think of you—it will be a consolation to me to do so—as being at Iris's side.

FANNY.

I shall contrive to be near her again soon, never fear. [*He holds out his hand; she grasps it.*] Luck!

LAURENCE.

[*Firmly.*] I shall have it.

FANNY.

[*In a whisper.*] Don't be long.

LAURENCE.

[*Lifting his head high.*] No; I shan't be long.

[*He leaves* FANNY *and encounters* CROKER, *who comes to him.*]

CROKER.

[*Shortly.*] Well, Trenwith——!

LAURENCE.

Well, Mr. Harrington!

CROKER.

When does England see you again?

LAURENCE.

In two years—three, at the furthest.

CROKER.

I believe you. If I'm alive——

[*They grip hands and part.* IRIS *is now on the balcony;* LAURENCE *joins her there.* FANNY *and* CROKER, *the one on the left of the room, the other on the right, stand deliberately looking away from the lovers.* LAURENCE *takes* IRIS *in his arms and kisses her; then he calls to* MALDONADO.]

LAURENCE.

Mr. Maldonado!

MALDONADO.

[*In the distance.*] Ohi!

[LAURENCE *disappears and* IRIS *remains on the balcony, leaning upon the balustrade, watching his retreating figure.* FANNY, *discovering by a glance that* IRIS *is alone, goes quickly to* CROKER, *who is struggling with his overcoat.*]

FANNY.

[*Breathlessly.*] Croker——

CROKER.

Eh?

FANNY.

Is *this* their farewell?

CROKER.

[*Puzzled.*] I—I presume so.

FANNY.

[*In complete astonishment.*] Good gracious!

CROKER.

Oh, but we forget—they have said good-bye already, poor children.

FANNY.

[*Nodding.*] Yes, that must be it. Still—[*rousing herself.*] Shall I assist you——?

[*She helps him into his coat. The band strikes up a fresh air, and the curtain drops. It rises after a moment's pause and the windows and the jalousies are closed and the room is in almost total darkness. Through the darkness* IRIS *is seen reclining upon the settee in the centre, sleeping.* LAURENCE *sits in a chair at the head of the settee, watching her. Both are dressed as in the earlier part of the act. The bells of a neighbouring church tinkle a little chime and then strike the quarter-hour; at short intervals this is repeated by other bells in the distance; whereupon* LAURENCE *rises softly and tip-toes over to the writing-table. There, taking a match-box from his pocket, he strikes a match and lights a wax taper which stands upon the table. The light awakens the sleeper, who opens her eyes and, raising herself upon her elbow, stares at him. He produces his watch, winds it, and sets its time by that of a travelling-clock upon the table.*]

IRIS.

Laurence!

LAURENCE.

Hush! don't be alarmed.

IRIS.

[*Confused.*] What——?

LAURENCE.

The lamp has burnt itself out. The church-bells chimed; and I struck a match, to look at my watch.

IRIS.

[*Pressing her hands upon her eyes.*] I had fallen asleep.

LAURENCE.

Yes; I have been sitting here, watching you.

[*She rises, with his help, a little unsteadily, and walks across to the writing-table, where she consults the travelling-clock.*]

IRIS.

A quarter past four. [*Turning to him.*] Oh! Why, you will soon—soon be—[*clinging to him*] almost directly——! Oh, how cruel of you to allow me to sleep—to waste the time! How cruel of you! [*Observing a faint light through the chinks of the jalousies.*] There's the dawn.

LAURENCE.

[*Sorrowfully.*] Yes.

IRIS.

The dawn——!

[*She turns from him and, seating herself in the chair before the writing-table, lays her head upon the table and weeps.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Bending over her.*] You were so white and weary, I saw your eyelids drooping, drooping; I hadn't the heart to rouse you. Dearest! dearest! dearest!

[*She composes herself gradually and rises, drying her eyes.*]

IRIS.

[*Humbly.*] Forgive me; I am very childish. Nothing can alter it—the day has to begin. [*Indicating the further window.*] Open the jalousies.

[*He opens the window and, stepping out upon the balcony, pushes back the jalousies. The dawn is seen, leaden-coloured and forbidding. She blows out the light of the taper and joins him at the window as he re-enters. He closes the window and they stand together for a while, his arm round her waist, gazing at the prospect.*]

IRIS.

[*Shivering.*] Oh! oh! oh!

[*She leaves him and walks away to the settee in the centre, where she sits with a scared look upon her face. He follows her.*]

IRIS.

Laurie——

LAURENCE.

Yes?

IRIS.

[*Piteously.*] It was a mistake, dear.

LAURENCE.

A mistake?

IRIS.

This sitting together through the night and talking away our last hours. It would have been wiser if I had done

what I at first had a mind to do—parted from you yesterday when the sun was shining brilliantly.

LAURENCE.

[*With an attempt at cheeriness.*] The sun will show himself again in a few minutes.

IRIS.

As it does when one is driving home from a late ball—defining everything sharply, making everything appear terribly distinct, [*holding out her hands to him*] terribly true. [*He sits beside her and, slipping her arm through his, she rests her head upon his shoulder.*] For how long was I sleeping?

LAURENCE.

An hour, perhaps.

IRIS.

And one's blood is always sluggish at dawn. It's at early morning that people sink and die. [*Tremblingly.*] Laurie!

LAURENCE.

[*Kissing her brow.*] Dearest!

IRIS.

I am afraid I have lost some of my courage! I'm frightened, I'm afraid.

LAURENCE.

Frightened——?

IRIS.

At your going away—at your leaving me.

LAURENCE.

Why, you were full of courage a little while ago.

IRIS.

Yes, and then I dropped off to sleep, [*nestling closer to him*] and became chilled.

LAURENCE.

[*Deliberately.*] Iris——

IRIS.

What?

LAURENCE.

Listen, Iris—now listen.

IRIS.

[*Fondly.*] I am listening; of course I am listening—listening——

LAURENCE.

Dearest, why should we not change our plans, even at the eleventh hour—abandon the idea of separating, separating until I am prepared to receive you? Prepared to receive you! what a stupid, formal sound the phrase has! Iris, my love, my wife, follow me to London to-morrow. I will book your passage in the ship, by telegram, immediately I get to town; we will be married as quickly as possible after our arrival at Montreal—there or at Victoria; we will go out together. What do you say?

IRIS.

[*Yearningly.*] Ah! ah! ah!

LAURENCE.

Yes, go out together; share the struggle from the very beginning; endure together; build up prosperity atom by atom, together.

IRIS.

[*Shaking her head.*] Ah, if it could be, dear; if it could be!

LAURENCE.

Why can't it be?

IRIS.

Oh, what a contempt Fanny would have for me——!

LAURENCE.

[*Disdainfully.*] Fanny——!

IRIS.

After all my protestations. And Croker and Maldo! [*Releasing him and sitting away from him.*] Yes, and how I should despise myself——!

LAURENCE.

Without the smallest reason.

IRIS.

Loathe myself! And how you would despise me, by-and-by, upon reflection——!

LAURENCE.

I!

IRIS.

Recollection that I had declined to make a sacrifice for you when I was well-off; that it was not till I was poor—almost as poor as yourself—that I would marry you; and that then I promptly hung myself round your neck like a stone—became a dead weight upon you at a time when you most needed freedom from care and responsibility.

LAURENCE.

Whenever you come to me—two, three years hence—you will come as a poor woman; you will come as a precious burden to me.

IRIS.

But after I have had my own struggle, my own battle with poverty, singly, alone; after I have proved to you that I can live, patiently, uncomplainingly, without luxury, willingly relinquishing costly pleasures, content with the barest comfort. [*Rising.*] Yes, yes—after I have shown you that there are other, and better, and deeper qualities in my nature than you have suspected; than I, myself, have suspected. [*He rises and takes her in his arms.*] Then, then I'll join you, Laurie. And in the meantime you musn't seek to make me falter in my resolutions. Help me to keep them, dear. I could cut my tongue out for having spoken as I did just now; I felt cold; I hadn't lost courage, really. [*Putting him from her and standing erect.*] Look at me! Fanny declares she's proud of me. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] Well—and you——?

LAURENCE.

[*Kneeling before her and taking her hands in his.*] Proud! proud! No man, honoured by the favours of a queen, ever felt deeper pride than I feel in the possession of your love.

IRIS.

[*Bending over him so that her lips almost touch his hair.*] My love—yes; but this other, loftier, purer side of me—I want you to be proud of that.

LAURENCE.

It is of that that I am proud. I cannot dissociate your love from your goodness; in my mind they have always been one. You have always been to me the best, the sweetest of women.

IRIS.

[*Smiling sadly.*] Ah! ah! But before you return to claim me you must forget. [*Entreatingly.*] You will forget?

LAURENCE.

Forget—and remember.

IRIS.

Oh, forget, dear, more than you remember. Come to me then as if you had never known me—or known me but a little. Let us then learn each other, as it were, afresh; raise up barriers between us, for the delight of breaking them down. [*Looking into space.*] Two years—three——!

LAURENCE.

They will pass quickly.

IRIS.

I pray they will; and yet, for shame's sake, not too quickly. So that, when you come to marry me, you may marry——

LAURENCE.

Yes?

IRIS.

One who is a stranger to you.

[*The church-bells strike the half-hour. They listen with strained ears. After a pause, he rises slowly.*]

IRIS.

[*Dully.*] What is that?

LAURENCE.

[*Walking away from her, his head bowed.*] Half-past four, I think. [*Other bells are heard.*]

IRIS.

I have lived here—how many weeks?—and have scarcely noticed those bells—

[*She goes to him and they stand side-by-side, without speaking, their hands tightly locked.*]

LAURENCE.

[*After the silence, with an assumption of cheerfulness.*] I've a little over an hour—that's ample. I paid my score last night, and the porter already has my big baggage. I've only to make my toilet and throw a few things into a kit-bag. [*Rubbing his chin.*] No time for a shave, though. I wonder whether the wait at Como will be long enough to enable me to visit a barber.

IRIS.

[*Passing her hand over his chin.*] Untidy fellow!

LAURENCE.

Untidy! oh, upon the ranche——

IRIS.

You won't wear beard? not a beard!

LAURENCE.

It shall be removed, in any event, before—before we——

IRIS.

Yes, don't you dare ever to venture into my presence——

[*They laugh together, pitifully; and, in the end, their laughter dying out, she cries unrestrainedly upon his shoulder. Then, with an effort, she leaves his side and throws open the further window. The heavy sky is now streaked with an ugly yellow bar.*]

IRIS.

There are some rain-drops. Has the weather broken at last?

[*He goes mechanically to the settee on the left and fetches his hat.*]

IRIS.

[*Coming to him and turning up the collar of his coat.*] Run, directly you get on to the road.

[*They walk to the open window.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Looking out.*] Yes—rain. [*Huskily.*] I'm afraid you'll be—horribly dull.

IRIS.

Shut the jalousies, so that the servants may find them closed. [*With clenched hands.*] Go now.

[*They embrace finally. He kisses her hands, her eyes, her lips.*]

IRIS.

[*In his ear.*] I have loved you. I shall love you always. I shall love you always.

[*He goes out on to the balcony, where he pauses, looking at her.*]

IRIS.

Close the jalousies! shut them!

[*He closes the jalousies, she the window, and the room is once more in darkness. With a low wail, she totters to the settee in the centre and throws herself upon it, burying her face in the pillows and sobbing violently. The curtain descends—rising again almost immediately. It is now day, but the rain is falling heavily, and the lake, and the hills beyond, are obscured as if by a grey veil.* IRIS*—dressed as before—is sitting in a chair by the further window, absorbed in contemplating the dreary prospect. Her hat, cape, and gloves are on the table on the right; and on the chair which remains at the head of the settee in the centre is her dressing-bag, open. The*

wooden case has disappeared, but the bird-cage, with its cover raised, is still upon the cabinet. The man-servant enters at the door.]

MAN-SERVANT.

I beg your pardon, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] Eh?

MAN-SERVANT.

At what hour do you desire the fly—the carriage?

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] I am expecting Mr. Maldonado—directly he has left me. [*The man is going.*] Put the bird upon the front seat. Be careful. [*He takes up the cage, which contains a solitary canary, and is again about to depart.*] Wait.

[*The man returns, placing the cage upon the table. She goes to her dressing-bag and searches for, and finds, a small velvet sack. From this she produces, quite heedlessly, a handful of gold pieces.*]

IRIS.

[*Throwing the little sack back into the dressing-bag.*] I shall be much obliged to you if you will distribute this among the servants, including yourself. [*Giving him the money and moving away towards the writing-table.*] I thank you all for the attention I have received here.

MAN-SERVANT.

[*Staring at the money, which he holds in two hands.*] I—I really beg pardon, ma'am——

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] What——?

MAN-SERVANT.

I—that is, we—we've heard—that is, we've been given to understand——

IRIS.

Eh? Ah, yes. [*Graciously.*] But this is the last time I may have the privilege—[*Busying herself in collecting certain little personal objects—her diary, date-case, address-book, a stamp-box, &c. &c.—which are upon the writing-table.*] I thank you once more.

MAN-SERVANT.

We—we are exceedingly grateful, ma'am.

[*Removing the cover from the bird-cage, he pours the money into it and, carrying the cage in one hand and the improvised money-bag in the other, withdraws. She takes up* LAURENCE'S *portrait and studies it fondly; then, after pressing it to her lips, she proceeds to find a place for it in her dressing-bag. The man-servant reappears.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

Mr. Maldonado.

[MALDONADO—*wet and mud-splashed—enters briskly and comes to her.*]

IRIS.

[*Giving him her hand.*] I have been waiting for you.

MALDONADO.

I went as far as Sala in the boat; [*giving his hat to the servant*] there I landed, and have tramped back.

IRIS.

Maldo! You are drenched!

MALDONADO.

Tsch!

[*He slips out of the cloak he is wearing and hands that also to the servant, who finally retires.*]

IRIS.

[*Gratefully.*] You have been true to your promise.

MALDONADO.

[*Triumphantly.*] A'ha!

IRIS.

Rising betimes, upon such a morning!

MALDONADO.

[*Laughingly.*] I was on my balcony at four o'clock, watching the dawn.

IRIS.

[*Turning away and sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] The dawn——?

MALDONADO.

[*Pulling off his wet gloves.*] I was restless—I suppose because I knew I had your business on hand. Before five I was outside the *Britannia,* throwing stones at Laurie's window. We had coffee together, he and I, and then, arm-and-arm, made for the pier.

IRIS.

Poor boy! Was he very downcast?

MALDONADO.

His heart was heavy enough, doubtless, but—[*with a shrug*] at eight-and-twenty, a new world ahead of you——

IRIS.

Naturally.

MALDONADO.

Phew! [*Seating himself upon the settee in the centre.*] Never heeding the rain, we paced the deck of the little steamer unceasingly. How time flies, when there is a common point of interest between two men! Our theme? Need I say we talked of you, of nothing but you, my dear Iris—our friend, our mistress, our goddess——?

IRIS.

[*Gently protesting.*] Hush!

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha! no. Now I reflect upon it, I believe I appropriated rather more than my fair share of the conversation. On certain topics, when once I am set going—ha!——

IRIS.

I am sure you cheered and amused him.

MALDONADO.

Ultimately I was put ashore, and the boat went off without me—went off hooting into the wet fog—and I was left staring at the particular patch of cloud that had engulfed her. Upon my soul, I think I was the more cut up of the two—no, that's exaggeration, of course. But the mental picture of the lonely lady of this villa—at her bed-room window, eh?—her eyes trying to pierce the mist—the mist of her tears and of the beastly, sodden air——

[*He rises abruptly, and goes to the further window and looks out. She wipes her tears away with her handkerchief. After a moment or two he comes to her and lays a hand upon her shoulder consolingly.*]

IRIS.

The last word he spoke—tell me——

MALDONADO.

Unfortunately, at Sala there was some confusion over his luggage and he was called from my side; so he had no opportunity—dear chap!—of sending a final message.

IRIS.

[*Disappointed.*] Ah!

MALDONADO.

But it's not difficult to surmise what its purport would have been. [*Looking at his watch.*] Not difficult, at any rate, for a poor devil who is also compelled to wrench himself away from you.

IRIS.

You, Maldo?

MALDONADO.

I, too, make my plunge into the mist this morning. I am driving to Porlezza, to pick up the afternoon train at Lugano.

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] You go to London?

MALDONADO.

To Brussels and Paris. I have received some upbraiding telegrams from our houses there.

IRIS.

Ah, you have wasted so much of your time with us.

MALDONADO.

Wasted!

IRIS.

Bestowed so much of your time upon us, I will say.

MALDONADO.

[*Stroking his beard.*] I was determined, at all costs, to see the end of poor Laurence.

IRIS.

[*With a pathetic pucker of her mouth.*] And Fanny and Croker to-morrow! And I—I at the little *Pension* at Tremezzo.

MALDONADO.

Picturesque, dirty Tremezzo, with its thousand odours! That reminds me—before I wish you good-bye—[*running his hand over the outside of his pockets*]—tsch! Have I left it at the hotel?—no, here it is——

[*He produces, from his breast-pocket, an unused cheque-book and carelessly turns its leaves.*]

IRIS.

What is that?

MALDONADO.

Before I say good-bye, let me explain why I leave this in your keeping.

IRIS.

[*Instinctively shrinking a little.*] A cheque-book?

MALDONADO.

My reason is this. I have presumed—ah, don't be too indignant with me—to pay into my bank, to your account —to the account of Iris Bellamy——

IRIS.

No, no!

MALDONADO.

I am humbly conscious that I appear to be opposing your wishes in doing what I have done.

IRIS.

Deliberately opposing them, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

What a terribly censorious expression! Well, if the amount were anything very considerable, there would, perhaps, be some justification for it.

IRIS.

I have already explained——

MALDONADO.

But a few hundred pounds—a thousand or so——

IRIS.

Oh, Maldo!

MALDONADO.

As a small reserve in the event of your being pressed by a debt—a debt overlooked in the general settlement——

IRIS.

Please——!

MALDONADO.

Or your feeling unhappy at Tremezzo, or elsewhere——

IRIS.

[*Touching his arm, appealingly.*] Maldo——

MALDONADO.

Poverty abounds in unpleasant surprises.

IRIS.

Maldo! Maldo!

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

Don't think me horribly ungracious. Indeed, indeed, I am full of gratitude to you, my dear friend. But upon the question of accepting help—money—I am firm; I am as hard as adamant. You must not, therefore, consider me unkind——

MALDONADO.

If you don't honour me by drawing a single cheque? My dear, I assure you I shall never trouble to enquire whether you had recourse to this paltry little fund at my bank or not. [*Bitterly.*] So, in this instance, you will be less cruel to me than to yourself.

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] You *are* hurt. I am always paining you; it seems to be my special misfortune.

MALDONADO.

Pish! throw the thing into your writing-case and forget it.

[*He passes her and throws the cheque-book upon the writing-table.*]

IRIS.

I would prefer that the book were not even left with me, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

[*Sarcastically.*] Oh, pray! Won't you at least do me the favour of burning it? May I not beg that indulgence of you?

IRIS.

[*In distress.*] Certainly, I'll destroy it.

MALDONADO.

[*With elaborate politeness.*] My most profound acknowledgments!

IRIS.

[*Taking his hand.*] Ah, don't, don't! [*Coaxingly.*] In a day or two I will write you a letter—a letter——

MALDONADO.

For small mercies——!

IRIS.

Oh, why be angry with me? What have I done? Maldo! Maldo! Maldo!

MALDONADO.

[*Looking into her eyes.*] It is impossible to be cross with you for more than a moment. There! I forgive you.

IRIS.

Ah!

MALDONADO.

This—and the rest. Adieu!

IRIS.

Adieu!

[*He kisses her hands, rather too warmly. She goes to the door and pulls the bell-rope.*]

MALDONADO.

Let me see—you transfer yourself to Varese——?

IRIS.

Next month, I think.

MALDONADO.

[*Lightly but with intention.*] Is Varese pleasant in November, I wonder?

IRIS.

[*Unconsciously.*] Very, they tell me.

MALDONADO.

Tsch! I fear I musn't indulge myself in another holiday yet awhile.

IRIS.

[*As before.*] No? You rich men work like slaves, Maldo.

MALDONADO.

Ha! what else is there in life?

[*He pauses a little longer, waiting for some further response from her. Receiving none, he looks at his watch again hurriedly.*]

MALDONADO.

I must be off. Good-bye.

IRIS.

[*Raising her head.*] Good-bye, Maldo.

[*He goes out. At the same moment* AUREA *appears outside the further window and, after looking into the room, raps upon the window-pane.*]

IRIS.

[*Turning.*] Ah! [*Opening the window.*] Aurea!

AUREA.

Good morning! here's a day!

IRIS.

Come in.

[AUREA, *who carries an umbrella, enters, brightly and eagerly.*]

IRIS.

[*Closing the window.*] What brings you out into the rain? [*Patting her cheeks.*] To water the roses?

AUREA.

As we go to-morrow, I thought I might not have another opportunity of seeing you alone. You have always been so sweet to me——

IRIS.

[*Kissing her.*] Ah!

AUREA.

Aunt Fanny says I am to be most careful to avoid sad subjects when I meet you, and to be bright and cheerful.

IRIS.

She is right.

AUREA.

So I've come to talk solely about myself. I want you to be the first—the very first—to hear my news.

IRIS.

News?

AUREA.

[*In a voice full of mystery.*] It's a dead secret. I shan't breathe a word of it to aunt until the business is absolutely settled.

IRIS.

Business——? I'm waiting.

AUREA.

[*Laughing gleefully.*] Ha, ha, ha! Let me get rid of my umbrella. [*Resting her umbrella against the table on the right and returning to* IRIS *with an air of importance.*] Now then! What do you think, dear Mrs. Bellamy! I've a prospect of being able to make myself independent of my relations.

IRIS.

Really!

AUREA.

Yes, positively. You know, while Aunt Fanny could afford to have me with her, my position was just endurable. But now—well, I can't expect to find the world full of Aunt Fannies, can I?

IRIS.

Tell me——

AUREA.

It's all through Miss Pinsent.

IRIS.

Kate Pinsent?

AUREA.

[*Nodding.*] Whom I met at your house at Kensington. You remember your lovely dinner-party?

IRIS.

[*Looking away.*] Perfectly.

AUREA.

We struck up a great friendship that night, Miss Pinsent and I. I wrote to her when we first heard of aunt's reverse, mentioning how I was situated. She's a dear!

IRIS.

[*Turning from* AUREA.] Yes. I am afraid I didn't treat her very considerately.

AUREA.

I'm certain you did; you do everybody. She adores you; so does everybody. [*In an outburst.*] We are going into business!

IRIS.

You and Kate!

AUREA.

That is, *she* is going into business, if she can overcome initial difficulties, and I am to be allowed to join her. [*Dropping upon the settee in the centre.*] Isn't it exciting?

IRIS.

You enterprising little woman! [*Advancing to her.*] Difficulties? What difficulties?

AUREA.

She has to find three or four hundred pounds, to decorate and fit up the rooms. [*With enjoyment.*] The rooms! four rooms; two on the first floor, and two on the second, where the girls will work——

IRIS.

[*Standing facing* AUREA *and looking down upon her.*] But Kate *has* money.

AUREA.

[*Shaking her head.*] No. And her mother to maintain! Isn't it rough?

IRIS.

[*Insistently.*] She saved money; she saved it with me—in my service. I know it.

AUREA.

Oh, yes—but that went.

IRIS.

Went——?

AUREA.

Mr. Kane had it.

IRIS.

[*Sitting beside* AUREA.] Kane!

AUREA.

Poor girl! she used to talk to him when he came to your house——

IRIS.

Of course.

AUREA.

And one day she asked him to invest her savings for her.

IRIS.

Gone——!

AUREA.

[*Nodding.*] Dreadfully hard lines! But she's awfully dogged, and if she can only induce somebody to stand by her over this undertaking——

IRIS.

Poor Kate! Fancy the avalanche crushing her too! A nice creature.

AUREA.

I'm certain she'll manage it somehow; she swears she'll move heaven and earth before she owns beat.

IRIS.

[*Thoughtfully, with knit brows.*] That's all very well. If she doesn't—if she can't——?

AUREA.

Oh, don't suggest that, Mrs. Bellamy! don't, don't suggest that!

[IRIS *rises and slowly walks towards the writing-table, while* AUREA, *not following her movements, rattles on emphatically.*]

AUREA.

Surely, surely there are plenty of generous, wealthy peo-

ple who will lend a helping hand to a woman. Kate has tried for another situation as companion, such as she held with you, and has failed. The salaries offered are impossible; there's but one Mrs. Bellamy on earth, she says—all the rest are in heaven. Oh, it would be too cruel if this chance escaped her—cruel on her and on me. Me! I believe I shall break my heart if it falls through. I think of nothing else, dream of nothing else—talk of nothing else, you'll say——

[IRIS *is now seated, quite composedly, before the writing-table, drawing a cheque in* MALDONADO'S *cheque-book.*]

IRIS.

Hush! hush! I'm writing.

AUREA.

[*Rising.*] I beg your pardon, dear Mrs. Bellamy.

[IRIS *carefully extracts the cheque from the book and blots it, and, taking an envelope from the table, rises and comes to* AUREA.]

IRIS.

[*Folding the cheque.*] Aurea, this little gift will put an end to those initial difficulties you speak of. Send it to your friend at once, with my good wishes.

AUREA.

[*Staring at the cheque as* IRIS *encloses it in the envelope.*] Oh——!

IRIS.

[*Giving the envelope to* AUREA.] Say that I am sincerely sorry I dismissed her so unkindly—so abruptly.

AUREA.

[*Breathlessly.*] Mrs. Bellamy—dear Mrs. Bellamy—you—*you* musn't attempt to do this for us!

IRIS.

It delights me to render this service—the last, perhaps, I shall ever render anybody.

AUREA.

But how—how *can* you——?

IRIS.

[*Looking down.*] I—I have unexpectedly come into possession of a—a trifling—[*uneasily*] Er—not a word, please, to your aunt.

AUREA.

N—no.

IRIS.

And, Aurea—mind!—you must put Kate Pinsent upon her honour—her word of honour—never to let a soul know——

[*The man-servant enters at the door.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

The carriage is here, ma'am.

IRIS.

[*To* AUREA.] Shall I give you a lift as far as the Belle Vue?

AUREA.

[*In a low voice.*] Aunt might wonder and put awkward questions.

IRIS.

[*With a glance of assent.*] I am to see you both at Tremezzo this afternoon?

AUREA.

Yes.

IRIS.

[*To the servant.*] Come back for my bag when you have let Miss Vyse out.

MAN-SERVANT.

Yes, ma'am.

AUREA.

[*Throwing her arms around* IRIS'S *neck.*] Oh! oh!

[*She snatches up her umbrella and runs away. The servant goes after her. With a troubled, half-guilty look,* IRIS *attires herself in her hat and cape; after which, carrying her gloves, she returns to her dressing-bag. Glancing round the room, to assure herself that she has collected all her small personal belongings, her eyes rest on the cheque-book which lies open on the writing-table. She contemplates it for a time, a gradually increasing fear showing itself in her face. Ultimately she walks slowly to the table and picks up the book. She is fingering it in an uncertain, frightened way when the servant returns.*]

MAN-SERVANT.

[*Standing over the bag.*] Is there anything more, ma'am——?

[*She hesitates, helplessly; then, becoming conscious that she is being stared at, she advances, drops the book into the bag, and passes out. The man shuts the bag, and is following her as the curtain falls.*]

END OF THE THIRD ACT.

THE FOURTH ACT

The scene represents a room in a Flat at the West End of London. The decorations are in delicate tints of pink and green touched with silver, and the furniture is correspondingly light and dainty. The fireplace, where a fire is burning, is in the centre of the wall furthest from the spectator. On one side of the fireplace—the left—is a door admitting to a bedroom; on the other side a door opening from the hall. A silken portière hangs over the bedroom door. In the wall on the right there is a deep recess in which is fitted a luxurious divan, and beyond this recess is a third door leading to another apartment. On the left-hand side of the room a bow window, provided with cushioned seats, gives a view of the houses on the opposite side of the street. A writing-table, chair, and waste-paper basket stand near the window; on either side of the fireplace is an armchair; and in the centre of the room there is a circular table on which breakfast is laid tastefully for one person. On the left of the breakfast-table is a chair, and on the right a settee with a little table behind it. Other articles of furniture, all pretty and fragile, are arranged about the room.

The light is that of a clear morning in winter.

[IRIS—*dressed in a handsome morning-robe—is seated at the table in the centre, a book propped-up before her, neglecting her breakfast. Her beauty has matured—become severer, more majestic; and her face has somewhat hardened. A grey lock, however, upon her brow, from which the hair is now taken back,*

gives a softening note. The door on the right of the fireplace—the door admitting from the hall—opens, and MALDONADO *enters with the air of a man who is thoroughly at home. He is without his hat but is still gloved. He comes to the right of the table and looks down upon her.*]

MALDONADO.

Morning.

[*She barely raises her eyes from her book. With a shrug, he seats himself in the chair on the right of the fireplace and pulls off his gloves.*]

MALDONADO.

Devilish cold. [*A pause.*] Your breakfast gets later and later. The hours you waste!

IRIS.

[*Mechanically stirring her tea.*] I have nothing to do.

MALDONADO.

You do nothing.

[*Having taken a cigarette from his case, he searches for matches upon the mantelpiece. Not finding them, he goes to the writing-table. There he comes upon a match-stand and lights his cigarette.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At the writing-table.*] The matches are never in the same place two days running.

IRIS.

[*Icily.*] Frederick——

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

I wish you would make it a practice to send your name in, instead of using a latch-key.

MALDONADO.

Why?

IRIS.

It would appear a little more respectful to me in the eyes of the servants, would it not? It's of no consequence.

[*After some hesitation, he produces a bunch of keys and removes from it a latch-key. Weighing the key in his hand meditatively, he walks towards the settee; then he turns and tosses the key upon the table.*]

IRIS.

Thanks.

MALDONADO.

[*Sitting upon the settee.*] Anything to satisfy you, my dear.

[*She picks up the key and, rising, drops it into a vase which stands upon the mantelpiece. The key strikes the bottom of the vase with a sharp sound. Having done this she resumes her seat and sips her tea.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Examining his nails.*] I particularly hoped to find you in an agreeable humour this morning. I wonder whether I can put you in one. Don't read. [*She lays her book aside.*] Iris.

IRIS.

Well?

MALDONADO.

I was turning matters over in my mind last week in Paris. Honestly, I'm no more content with the present condition of affairs than you are.

IRIS.

Than I am? I'm not aware that I have expressed any special discontent.

MALDONADO.

[*With a short laugh.*] Ha! Upon my soul, you have the knack of freezing a man.

IRIS.

What is it you have to propose, Frederick?

MALDONADO.

[*Leaning forward, his elbows on his knees.*] Iris, I want to invite you to come round the corner—to Mount Street.

IRIS.

To Mount Street?

MALDONADO.

To my house—in a settled position.

IRIS.

[*Indifferently.*] Oh?

MALDONADO.

Do you remember our talk of two years ago last summer, on the occasion of that dinner-party at your place, when you declared your willingness to do your duty as my wife, as mistress of my establishment, squarely and faithfully. You sold me then—a subject we won't enlarge on. Well, there hangs the old Velasquez still, and the Raphael, and the Murillo, and once more I offer to frame you gorgeously and to place you along with them; making you permanently —what was my phrase?—"mine to gaze at, mine to keep from others." What d'you say?

IRIS.

[*After a pause.*] Why *now?*

MALDONADO.

Why now?

IRIS.

Yes; why now?

MALDONADO.

I—I've treated you a bit roughly, you mean?

[*She rises, with an eloquent gesture, and goes to the chair on the left of the fireplace, where she sits.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, I own up. I intended to have my revenge, if I could get it; and I've had it. Yes, I meant it.

IRIS.

[*Writhing.*] Oh!

MALDONADO.

I repeat, I own up. I make a clean breast of it, you see —as an inducement to you to wipe the slate.

IRIS.

It *was* deliberate, then, from the very first—cruelly deliberate?

MALDONADO.

[*With a nod.*] I'll even beg pardon, if it would please you.

IRIS.

Your arrival at Cadenabbia, from Aix——?

MALDONADO.

I'd heard you were travelling with that pup-dog at your heels——

IRIS.

Of whom are you speaking?

MALDONADO.

Sorry—Trenwith. And I wanted to be sure; I couldn't credit it. You! To throw me over when I'd won you honourably—shove me aside, after my long waiting, at the moment of my success, for a lover! It kept me awake; I wasn't sleeping. That brought me to Cadenabbia.

IRIS.

[*Musingly.*] I've often wondered.

MALDONADO.

Ha! I believe I came by the same train that carried the newspapers containing the account of Kane's bolting. There was an opening at once——

IRIS.

To play the friend, the consoling friend—ah!——

MALDONADO.

[*After a pause, moodily.*] Anything more?

IRIS.

What would you have done if events had not shaped themselves in your favour—if Mr. Trenwith and I had not parted?

MALDONADO.

I don't know—frankly. It gives me the shivers sometimes—the mere conjecture. There were days at Aix when I felt mad.

IRIS.

[*With a long-drawn sigh.*] Ah—h—h!

MALDONADO.

Eh?

IRIS.

I wish you had been merciful and had taken me out on to the lake and drowned me.

MALDONADO.

Ugh!

IRIS.

That cheque-book—you were sure I'd avail myself of it?

MALDONADO.

I was pretty certain you couldn't drag on for long upon a few pounds a week. *You* couldn't.

IRIS.

[*Satirically.*] How mad you were!

MALDONADO.

And as your careering-about abroad, with a young gentleman in attendance, had alienated the friends who could have aided you, I calculated the chances were all my way.

IRIS.

The chances of your being able to destroy me utterly——

MALDONADO.

The chances of crying quits with Trenwith.

IRIS.

[*Clenching her hands.*] Oh, don't—don't——!

MALDONADO.

[*After another pause.*] Anything more?

[*She is silent. He rises and goes to the fireplace, where he stands, his back to the fire, contemplating her.*]

MALDONADO.

You're not over keen about my suggestion, apparently.

IRIS.

I!

MALDONADO.

I fancied you'd be glad. Upon my soul, I imagined you'd be rather—gratified.

IRIS.

[*Rising and standing beside him, composedly.*] I am sorry if you are disappointed. I'm afraid I've no longer the capacity for being gratified at anything. I haven't it; it's gone.

MALDONADO.

It's odd that, somehow, whenever the question of marriage has arisen between us, you've always contrived to make me look an ass in my own eyes.

IRIS.

[*Languidly.*] Need you regard it in that way?

MALDONADO.

Look here, Iris! you must at least see that I desire to make it up to you—desire to make amends. Surely that flatters you, if ever so slightly. You used the word "respect" a minute ago. Does this look as if I entertained no respect for you? [*Between his teeth.*] I'm d—— I mean, I can't understand you.

IRIS.

Amends? What amends can you make me?

MALDONADO.

Isn't marriage amends?

IRIS.

[*Trifling with the flowers on the breakfast-table.*] It's too late, I tell you. I'm down, beyond recovery. I've lost heart. I no longer care. I'm shunned like poison——

MALDONADO.

[*Behind her shoulder.*] People cut you? You musn't blame me wholly for that.

IRIS.

I don't. I'm not unfair. And it isn't that which hurts me most even now. [*Closing her eyes.*] But to shun *one's self——!* to cut *one's self——* No, no; it's all over with me— everything's over. Marriage! a farce!

[*She passes him and walks away to the head of the settee. He follows her.*]

MALDONADO.

At any rate, in talking in this fashion, you take only one point of view. There's another.

IRIS.

Yours? Oh, yes, there's your point of view. But why on earth should *you* wish to marry *me?*

MALDONADO.

Is it a novel wish on my part?

IRIS.

No; but bruised fruit——

MALDONADO.

[*Seizing her hands.*] Can't you be less bitter? Listen to me! listen to me!

IRIS.

[*Freeing herself and leaning against the head of the settee, facing him.*] I am doing so.

MALDONADO.

You'll laugh at me—no, that's not your way; you'll stab me with those steel-grey eyes of yours, tighten your lips till the sight of their thin red line stings me like whip-cord. All the same, you've got to hear it—I love you. I love you more than ever, my dear. What's in you? You're extraordinary. By the common rule of life I ought to be chafing to be rid of you; the fizz should have gone entirely out of what remains of the liquor by this time. But it's not so. I say it's wonderful, considering what's behind us, that we should stand here as we do—I again entreating you to be my wife, still entreating you, as I did two years back, for a soft word, a spark of warmth, just a little tenderness. [*Gripping her shoulders and looking into her face so closely that she shrinks back.*] I shall never be able to do without you, Iris; you grow on a man—never be able to spare you. The idea of your wanting to break away from me one day is insupportable. What did I ask you to call me, that night in Kensington—Beloved? Fool! And yet this morning, notwithstanding all that has passed since then, I'd give half of everything I have in the world if you'd speak that word. I will give it; I lay it at your feet. Iris! [*Drawing her to him.*] Iris! you devil in marble!

[*There is a silence between them for a moment or two, neither stirring. Then she gently disengages herself and moves away to the writing-table.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Following her with his eyes.*] Well——?

IRIS.

I—I will think about it.

MALDONADO.

[*Passing his hand across his brow.*] Think about it ——? Think about it! [*Going towards her.*] Oh, yes. [*Suddenly.*] You haven't heard from that fellow lately, have you?

IRIS.

Mr. Trenwith?

MALDONADO.

Mister Trenwith.

IRIS.

No.

MALDONADO.

Nor written to him? [*She shakes her head.*] When did you last write?

IRIS.

It doesn't matter.

MALDONADO.

[*Fiercely.*] When?

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] Four months ago—or five. [*Sitting in the chair by the writing-table.*] I forget exactly.

MALDONADO.

And he?

IRIS.

He continued his letters for a time, reproaching me for forgetting him. They have ceased—ceased.

MALDONADO.

You are sure?

IRIS.

Sure? Quite sure.

[*She breaks down and cries. He watches her for a while, then turns from her and sits at the breakfast-table.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Digging a fork into the table-cloth viciously.*] Will you come to a theatre to-night?

IRIS.

[*Wiping her eyes.*] If you wish it.

MALDONADO.

Dine somewhere beforehand?

IRIS.

As you please.

MALDONADO.

Where?

IRIS.

Anywhere.

MALDONADO.

What theatre? [*A pause.*] What theatre?

[*There are some unopened newspapers upon the little table behind the settee. She crosses over to the table and picks up one of them. She is unfolding it when he comes to her.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At her side.*] How long will it take you to make up your mind?

IRIS.

[*Dully.*] About the theatre?

MALDONADO.

No, no; about our marriage.

IRIS.

A week; let me have a week. [*Sitting upon the settee.*] There can be no necessity for haste.

MALDONADO.

[*Discontentedly.*] A week? Pish! [*Leaning against the breakfast-table.*] However, we'll say a week.

IRIS.

[*Gazing listlessly before her, the paper falling to the floor.*] If we do marry, you must promise not to insist upon my continuing to live in England.

MALDONADO.

Why?

IRIS.

There would be a revival of interest in me, as your wife. Heaps of those who have dropped me, half-forgotten me—who wouldn't touch me, as I am, with gloves on—would rally round me because of your wealth. I couldn't suffer that.

MALDONADO.

I shouldn't ask you to.

IRIS.

What! you and I alone, then, in that great house in Mount Street! No, no; not England, if we marry.

MALDONADO.

All right. So be it. [*With a shrug.*] We can easily take down the Velasquez and hang him elsewhere. After all, England is a paradise only for the puritan and the hypocrite. [*His spirits rising.*] Ha, ha! Farewell, England! Land of lean women and smug men, of the drooping eyelid and the sanctimonious drawl! Land of money-worship, of cant and pharisaism, of false sentiment and namby-pamby ideals—in every department of life, the suburb of the universe! Ha, ha, ha! England, farewell! [*Advancing to her.*] Paris?

IRIS.

The women there are so terrible—the women who would claim equality with me.

MALDONADO.

One must live somewhere.

IRIS.

[*Wearily.*] That's it; that's it.

MALDONADO.

And yet, why reside anywhere? Who so at home everywhere as the homeless rich? We'll be cosmopolitans of the first order, shall we? [*Bending over her.*] Why, I'd carry Velasquez and his companions on my back, from city to city, if you'd walk beside me with your hand in mine. [*Holding out his hand.*] Ah, sweetest!

IRIS.

[*Looking up at him, with an expressionless face, and laying her hand in his.*] You are not all bad, Maldo.

[*There is a knock at the door and* IRIS *rises. They separate; she goes to the writing-table, he to the fireplace.*]

IRIS.

Come! [*A woman-servant enters, from the hall.*]

SERVANT

Mr. Harrington.

IRIS.

[*Seated at the writing-table.*] I'll see him.

[*The servant withdraws, closing the door.*]

MALDONADO.

[*With a wry face.*] Tsch! you don't mind being bored.

He's become too sour and grumpy for words, this chap. You know they've kicked him out of the secretaryship of that club? How the devil he lives——!

[*The servant returns, showing in* CROKER HARRINGTON. CROKER *has lost his smartness—is almost shabby—and has aged out of proportion to the time that has elapsed. He stands regarding* MALDONADO *with an expression approaching a scowl. The servant retires.*]

MALDONADO.

[*With a nod.*] Good morning.

CROKER.

Good morning.

[*He comes to* IRIS *and shakes hands with her silently.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Leaving the fire.*] You were at the wedding yesterday, I suppose, my dear Croker?

CROKER.

[*Surlily.*] Yes.

MALDONADO.

And you come fully charged with all the delightful details, eh?

IRIS.

I hope so.

MALDONADO.

Miss Sylvain—a tolerably mature bride. I sent her a wedding present—which she had the impudence to return. [*To* IRIS, *as he moves towards the door on the right.*] May I write two or three letters here, while you chat to our friend?

IRIS.

Why do you ask me?

MALDONADO.

[*At the door.*] Do decide about that theatre.

[*He goes, leaving the door ajar.* IRIS *crosses over to the door and peeps into the adjoining room.*]

IRIS.

[*Closing the door softly.*] He has gone into the further room. We can talk freely. [*She motions* CROKER *to sit upon the settee; he obeys her. Then she brings the chair from the left of the breakfast-table and sits, facing him eagerly.*] How did she look?

CROKER.

Well.

IRIS.

Sweet?

CROKER.

[*Nodding.*] H'm.

IRIS.

The bridesmaids—were there many?

CROKER.

Four.

IRIS.

Four?

CROKER.

Evelyn Littledale——

IRIS.

Of course.

CROKER.

Margot Cowley——

IRIS.

She!

CROKER.

Her niece——

IRIS.

Aurea? Oh, yes—the girl I was rather fond of.

CROKER.

And a sister of the bridegroom.

IRIS.

Was the church well-filled? The Wynnings—were they present? The Chadwicks? the Saddingtons? the Vanes? the Glenne-Smiths? [*He nods in response to each inquiry.*] Oh, I knew them all! [*She weeps again, then recovers herself and dries her eyes.*] Well! *exit* Fanny! I passed her, the other day, in Davies Street. I saw her first in the distance, and put back my veil so that she should notice my white lock Sorrow and remorse have their egotism, as ease and joy have, and I am proud of my grey hair. But she purposely kept her eyes down.

CROKER.

[*Brusquely.*] Perhaps—in time——

IRIS.

Never—with a husband. That hope's gone. You're the last. And you've altered towards me.

CROKER.

[*Sternly.*] Altered! What do you expect?

IRIS.

[*With her habitual pathetic little twist of her mouth.*] No, I must have disappointed you sadly. Do you recollect describing to me once, in the Kensington days, your ideal of woman? It was at the time you were——

CROKER.

Perfectly.

IRIS.

You said you asked nothing more of a woman—what?——

CROKER.

Than that she should be beautiful to the eye and gentle to the ear; that her face should brighten when I entered, her hand linger in mine when I departed; that she should never allow me to hear her speak slightingly of any honest man, thereby assuring me she indulged in no contemptuous criticism of me when I was out of her company; that she should be bountiful to the poor, unafraid of the sick and unsightly, fond of dumb animals and strange children, and tearful in the presence of fine pictures and at the sound of rich music.

IRIS.

And I inspired that!

CROKER.

You did.

IRIS.

[*With a sigh.*] How vain I felt! And yet—by chance, I suppose—never anticipating!—you left out something—something essential—that goes to the making of a perfect woman?

CROKER.

To the making of a good woman—yes.

IRIS.

[*Wincing.*] Sssh! sssh!

[*Bending forward, she lays her head upon his knees. So she remains for a few moments, both silent, he looking down upon her.*]

CROKER.

[*In a low voice.*] Iris—[*She sobs.*] There is one other item of news I have to give you—not connected with Fanny's wedding——

IRIS.

[*Inarticulately.*] Yes?

CROKER.

You will have no difficulty in guessing it, I fancy.

IRIS.

Eh?

CROKER.

The inevitable has happened. I've always warned you.

[*She raises her head slowly and stares at him. Reading his news in his face, she rises.*]

IRIS.

Back!

[*He answers her with his eyes. She sways and he catches her by the arm and assists her to the settee.*]

CROKER.

It occurred late last night. I turned into a little restaurant in Soho—an old resort of his, it appears—for my supper. He came in; we stared at one another for a moment—then he rushed at me. His ship had docked at Liverpool earlier in the day and he had just driven from Euston. I pretended that I had finished eating, and, after a brief talk, got away.

IRIS.

[*Her eyes closed.*] How does he bear it?

CROKER.

He's mystified; believes some one has come between you and him; and is here to find out the facts.

[*She opens her eyes and looks at him dully; then she suddenly sits upright.*]

IRIS.

He—he doesn't know, then?

CROKER.

No. [*She struggles to her feet.*] And I was careful that he should extract nothing from me.

IRIS.

He has not heard—not heard——!

[*She moves about the room in an agitated, aimless way, sitting in one place only to rise immediately and transfer herself to another, and uttering brief, half-articulate comments as* CROKER *proceeds.*]

CROKER.

I allowed him to understand that your friendship for me had somewhat cooled——

IRIS.

Cooled——?

CROKER.

In order that he shouldn't be puzzled by my unusual ignorance concerning you.

IRIS.

Ah, yes.

CROKER.

"That's it, Harrington!" he said, "she is being drawn away from her friends. By whom?"

IRIS.

Ah!

CROKER.

He wanted information, naturally, as to your whereabouts. You had returned to London, I told him, but—how stupid of me!—I couldn't recall the name of the street in which you are lodging. Ha!

IRIS.

Well?

CROKER.

He has gone to an hotel in Villiers Street. I have undertaken to hunt up your address [*referring to his watch*] and to let him have it during the morning.

IRIS.

[*Pausing, confusedly.*] And—and will you?

CROKER.

Not without your authority to do so. My object was simply to stop him, for a few hours, from busying himself in making enquiries——

IRIS.

[*Nodding, faintly.*] Enquiries——

CROKER.

Thinking you might wish to be before others with your story.

IRIS.

[*Coming to him and grasping his hands.*] Ah! ah! ah!

CROKER.

[*Grimly.*] In the meantime he is occupied feverishly at his tailor's and haberdasher's, I expect.

IRIS.

What shall I do, Croker? What course shall I adopt? Quick! We shall be interrupted directly. Oh, help me, please!

CROKER.

[*Harshly.*] Excuse me; the rest is with you. I regret I don't feel able to advise you.

[*He turns from her and walks away to the fireplace, where he stands looking into the fire.*]

IRIS.

[*Weakly.*] Ah, that's unkind—unkind——!

[*She drops into the chair before the writing-table and sits for a time, her elbows on the table, tightly holding her brows. Then she seizes a pen and writes rapidly upon a sheet of note-paper.*]

IRIS.

[*While she writes.*] Croker—Croker——

[*He returns to her slowly. When she has finished her note, she scrawls a name upon an envelope and rises.* CROKER *is at her side; she holds the note before him.*]

CROKER.

[*As he reads it.*] You will see him to-night at nine o'clock——

IRIS.

Yes.

CROKER.

If he can come to you with pity in his heart.

IRIS.

[*Folding the note with trembling hands.*] You will take this to him?

CROKER.

[*Between his teeth.*] I! Oh, yes.

IRIS.

[*Enclosing the note.*] At once—at once——

CROKER.

Ho, certainly! at once.

IRIS.

[*Looking at him in surprise.*] Croker!

CROKER.

Having lied for you plentifully to one [*with a glance in* MALDONADO'S *direction*] I am now employed to deceive the other. Have you any further degradation for me? How much lower is my insane devotion to bring me?—tell me that! tell me that!

IRIS.

Dear friend!

CROKER.

Degradation! yes. A hanger-on! a complacent hanger-on! And to-day the common go-between! Ah, you have crushed the life, the spirit, the manhood out of me!

IRIS.

Oh!

CROKER.

[*Holding out his hand for the letter.*] But give it to me.

IRIS.

[*After a pause.*] No; I'll not.

CROKER.

Come! I daresay I'm brutal. And, perhaps, a little jealous! Jealous! There! what an admission! what a depth for a man to touch! [*Still holding out his hand.*] Come, give it to me. [*Meekly.*] This is the first time I've protested, at any rate.

IRIS.

You are right. I ought not to have asked you—[*tearing up the note.*] I—I beg your pardon.

[*She throws the pieces into the waste-paper basket and, passing* CROKER, *seats herself upon the settee. He*

sinks into the chair by the writing-table, burying his head in his hands.]

IRIS.

[*Staring at the carpet.*] Besides, it would be a dreadful confession to make to him personally—[*with a look, under her brows, round the room*] here, too. You haven't told me the name of the hotel—in Villiers Street, did you say? I'll do what you urged me to do at first; I'll endeavour to put it all on paper—to put everything on paper——

[*A door slams in the distance.*]

CROKER.

[*Raising his head.*] Maldonado——!

[*She collects herself and picks up the newspaper.*]

CROKER.

[*Rising and going over to her quickly—speaking in low, hurried tones.*] Iris, forget my boorishness. He shall be with you to-night at nine.

[*She grasps at his arm as he leaves her. He is at the door leading to the hall when* MALDONADO *returns carrying some freshly-written letters.*]

MALDONADO.

[*To* CROKER.] Hullo! you going?

CROKER.

Yes.

MALDONADO.

Ta-ta!

[CROKER *disappears, closing the door behind him.*]

MALDONADO.

[*At the fireplace.*] Where is he off to, in such a hurry

—the workhouse? There's a man who knew half London; now he hasn't a friend in the world, excepting yourself.

IRIS.

[*Mutteringly.*] Except myself.

MALDONADO.

Eh? [*Advancing to her.*] Still hunting for that theatre?

IRIS.

Theatre——?

MALDONADO.

The theatre—to-night——

IRIS.

[*With a catch in her breath.*] To-night——?

MALDONADO.

Didn't we arrange——? Aren't you well, my dear?

IRIS.

[*Rising—speaking hesitatingly and painfully.*] Maldo—the—the week that I am to be allowed—the week——

MALDONADO.

Week——?

IRIS.

The week in which to consider your—your proposal——

MALDONADO.

Oh, yes.

IRIS.

I wish you would leave me entirely alone in the meanwhile—not see me—not come near me——

MALDONADO.

[*His eyes blazing.*] Have you been consulting Harrington?

IRIS.

No. No, no.

MALDONADO.

Haven't you?

IRIS.

I have not mentioned the matter to him—not given him a hint——

MALDONADO.

[*After a pause.*] What, are you afraid that my fascinating presence would unduly influence your decision?

[*She is silent, her hands twitching at the newspaper. There is a further pause.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, very well. You shall have a perfectly quiet time, if you desire it. I shall go down, then, this afternoon to Rubenstein's, at Bream Park, for a few days.

IRIS.

Th—thanks. Thanks.

[*She walks away to the divan and throws herself upon it, settling herself in its cushions, with her back towards him, and making a show of reading the newspaper.*]

MALDONADO.

Have you any postage-stamps?

IRIS.

[*As she arranges herself upon the divan.*] You will find them in my stamp-box.

[*He seats himself at the writing-table, discovers the stamp-box, and proceeds to affix stamps to his letters. While he is thus occupied, his eye is attracted by the writing upon certain scraps of paper lying near the waste-paper basket. They are fragments of* IRIS's

note—some of which have fallen into the basket, others upon the floor. He picks up two or three of these pieces and examines them. Then he turns his head sharply and looks at IRIS. *Seeing that she is not observing him, he hurriedly collects the pieces remaining upon the floor and also those in the basket. Humming an air to disguise his proceedings, he hastily fits the scraps together upon the table; after which he sweeps them into a heap and thrusts them into his waistcoat-pocket.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Rising.*] Papers are dull this morning?

IRIS.

Very.

[*Resuming his humming, he puts his letters away in the tail of his coat and moves stealthily towards the mantelpiece. There he takes down a vase, shakes it against his ear, and replaces it. He repeats the process with another vase, this time with success; whereupon, first pulling up his coat-sleeve and shirt-cuff, he inserts his hand and arm into the vase and regains possession of his latch-key. Pocketing the key, he breaks off from his singing and, with an evil look upon his face, comes to* IRIS.]

MALDONADO.

This day week?

IRIS.

[*Giving him a hand without turning.*] Yes.

[*He leaves her as the curtain falls.*]

END OF THE FOURTH ACT.

THE FIFTH ACT

The scene is unchanged. It is night-time. The electric light, softened by shades of rose-coloured silk, diffuses a warm glow over the room.

[*The room is empty. There is a knock at the door on the right of the fireplace. The knock is repeated; then the door is opened and the woman-servant enters. Finding nobody, she goes to the door on the left and, drawing the portière aside, knocks at that door gently. Having knocked, she drops the portière and, retreating a few steps, waits. Presently a hand is seen holding the portière and* IRIS'S *voice is heard.*]

IRIS.

[*Very faintly.*] Yes?

SERVANT.

The gentleman, ma'am.

[*The curtain is disturbed and the hand vanishes.*]

SERVANT.

[*Approaching the curtain.*] I beg your pardon, ma'am——

IRIS.

Ask him in.

[*The servant goes out at the door at which she entered and returns almost immediately with* LAURENCE. LAURENCE *is in evening dress, but, in place of his town air, he has the bronzed face and slightly stif-*

fened gait of a man accustomed to life in the open. He is wearing an overcoat and carries a felt hat. The servant withdraws, leaving him gazing about him in some bewilderment. Slowly surveying the apartment, he puts his hat upon the little table behind the settee and is taking off his gloves when the portière again moves and IRIS *appears. She remains in the doorway, her back towards him, clutching the curtain.*]

LAURENCE.

Iris——!

[*She turns and faces him. She is clad entirely in black and wears no jewellery or embellishment of any description.*]

LAURENCE.

Iris—Iris——!

[*He stretches out his arms. For a moment she wavers; then, with a swift movement, she sweeps across the room and falls upon his breast.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Kissing her passionately.*] My dearest! my dearest! Iris, you are unaltered towards me? Iris! tell me you are quite unchanged.

IRIS.

[*Murmuring his name as she clings to him.*] Laurie—Laurie—Laurie!

LAURENCE.

Kiss me—you don't kiss me——

[*With a cry, she takes his head between her hands and kisses him.*]

LAURENCE.

Ah! Nothing has occurred to cause you to withdraw your love from me? I only want you to assure me of that.

IRIS.

[*Her arms twined about his neck.*] I love you—I love you—I love you——

LAURENCE.

Thank God! Your silence has driven me almost distracted. How could you be so cruel to me?

IRIS.

[*Hiding her face against his shoulder.*] Cruel—cruel—yes, cruel——!

LAURENCE.

What had I done to deserve it? I can't understand your motive——

IRIS.

Hush! Wait—not yet—not yet. Kiss me again.

LAURENCE.

[*Obeying her.*] Ah! ah! Ha, ha! Let me look at you. [*Holding her at arm's length.*] I am dying to look at you.

IRIS.

[*Her eyes closed.*] Ah?

LAURENCE.

You are more beautiful than ever.

IRIS.

[*Swooningly.*] Oh——!

LAURENCE.

Your face! it was always divine, but it has become still more spiritual—saint-like——

IRIS.

Ah, ha?

LAURENCE.

[*Passing his hand over her brow.*] I see—you have dressed your hair away from your forehead. That is it—you resemble the pictures of angels one was familiar with in childhood.

IRIS.

A—a dark angel!

LAURENCE.

[*Observing her dress for the first time.*] Why, yes; I didn't notice—Dearest, are you in mourning?

IRIS.

[*Supporting herself upon his arm as she looks into his face.*] Mourning? This is not mourning: it is merely black. Nothing but the loss of you would make it mourning. [*With an attempt at brightness.*] Ha! it was my fancy to receive you in this gown.

[*She turns from him and walks away, a little unsteadily, to the fireplace.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Following her.*] How long may I remain with you? You are not going to send me away quickly?

IRIS.

That depends upon yourself. I—I am free for the rest of the evening.

[*Gaily.*] Depends upon me! [*Taking off his overcoat and throwing it over the back of the chair on the left of the fireplace.*] Well, a month would hardly suffice for me to say all I have to say to you. [*Returning to her and seizing her hands, which he presses again and again to his lips.*] Dearest, why—why did you cease writing to me? The torture of waiting for that infernal post——! What could have been your reason?

IRIS.

[*Tremblingly.*] What did you imagine it was—did you think I was ill?

LAURENCE.

At first. I cabled home to Miss Sylvain, asking her if it was so.

IRIS.

To Fanny Sylvain——!

LAURENCE.

And received a laconic reply—"best of health." There my pride stepped in. Oh, the soil of a lonely ranche is favourable to the cultivation of a certain sort of sullen pride! Ah, but the agony of it! Iris, the theories I formed—all of them incorrect, doubtless——! Now, at last, you can blow them away with a breath——

IRIS.

[*Plucking at his sleeve.*] Laurence—have you seen Croker?

LAURENCE.

[*Nodding.*] Last night.

IRIS.

Yes; but to-day——?

LAURENCE.

No. He merely left a note at my hotel, giving me your message.

IRIS.

Message——?

LAURENCE.

That I was to be here, at your lodgings, at nine.

IRIS.

Nothing further?

LAURENCE.

[*Shaking his head.*] Nothing further.

IRIS.

And you've met no one else of our acquaintance?

LAURENCE.

Nobody. [*Smiling.*] I've been frantically busy, trying to make myself presentable for this visit.

IRIS.

Those theories of yours—what were they?

LAURENCE.

One of them—[*looking about the room, a trace of apprehension in his voice*] don't tell me there was ever any ground for it——

IRIS.

One of them——?

LAURENCE.

Was that your friends had come to your assistance, on condition that you broke faith with a struggling, hard-working fellow in British Columbia. [*Embracing her.*] Ah, forgive me!

[*The chair in which* IRIS *was seated, at breakfast, in the preceding act is now on the further side of the table with its back to the fireplace. She releases herself from* LAURENCE'S *embrace and sits in this chair, a desperate look in her eyes, steeling herself for her task.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Leaning over her shoulder.*] Dearest, can you blame me? As I have said—the distorted ideas solitude gives rise

to——! [*Surveying the room once more.*] And even now I can't help feeling puzzled——[*Dropping his voice.*] What a charming place you have here!

IRIS.

[*Faintly.*] Ah?

LAURENCE.

Did your new lawyer manage to recover for you more than he expected? [*Struck by a new thought.*] Iris, surely you have not been angry with yourself for not fulfilling your promise to starve during my absence?

IRIS.

[*Her elbows on the table, digging her fingers into her hair.*] You—you are nearing the truth!

LAURENCE.

[*Fervently, his lips close to her ear.*] Oh, my love! my dear love! in whatever way these comforts have come to you, how could you doubt that I should be the first to rejoice that you have not, after all, been waiting for me in privation and anxiety?

IRIS.

[*In a hard, level voice—gently pushing him from her.*] Laurence—it is about—the way in which these comforts have come to me—that I want to talk to you.

[*She points to the settee and he seats himself there, a growing fear expressed in his face.*]

IRIS.

[*Sitting upright, her body stiff, her eyes averted—with the little twist of her mouth.*] Laurie, this charming place is not mine.

LAURENCE.

No?

IRIS.

That is—it is not maintained by myself.

LAURENCE.

By your friends—as I supposed?

IRIS.

By a friend. [*A pause.*] A friend. [*A further pause.*] Yes, there *is* something—in your theory——

LAURENCE.

[*Shortly.*] Oh? [*Slowly.*] You mean the condition does exist—the condition obliging you to be untrue to me? Iris——!

[*With an effort she turns her head and meets his gaze.*]

IRIS.

[*Deliberately.*] It is a man-friend.

[*He allows the words to soak into his brain, then he rises and advances to her. She rises with him and they stand, facing each other, on opposite sides of the table.*]

LAURENCE.

A man-friend?

IRIS.

Mr. Maldonado.

LAURENCE.

[*Under his breath.*] Maldonado!

IRIS.

He is master here.

LAURENCE.

Master——! I—you must speak plainer.

IRIS.

He—intended to take his revenge——

LAURENCE.

Revenge!

IRIS.

He never rested—never rested—until——

LAURENCE.

Until——?

IRIS.

He was able—to cry quits with you.

[LAURENCE *recoils. Opening her eyes widely she gives him a final look of guilt and abasement; then she collapses suddenly, dropping into her chair and laying her head and outstretched arms upon the table. He continues staring at her for a time; ultimately, covering his face with his hands, he sinks upon the settee.*]

IRIS.

[*Lifting her head.*] No, he never left me alone. There's no palliation in that, perhaps, no excuse—but he never left me alone. [*Bursting into tears.*] Oh, I meant to be poor! I meant to be poor!

[*She rises and goes to the fireplace, upon which she leans, weeping.*]

IRIS.

He—he placed some money at my disposal before he quitted Cadenabbia—opened an account for me, without my leave, at his bank in London. That was the beginning of it—the beginning of the path leading down to this awful abyss. I remained at Tremezzo barely a fortnight. I went there, as you know, because it was at Tremezzo we had passed such delicious hours; and I believed your spirit would

linger about those quiet spots where we had been constantly together, you with your sketch-book on your knees, I close to you, both silent and happy. And so it was—only your presence became a reproach to me instead of a solace, a haunting reproach; for almost from the very moment of my receiving it, my hand accustomed itself to scrawling cheques, for one object and another, in the cheque-book he had considerately furnished me with. Therefore, finding my conscience wouldn't let me sit with your spirit in those dear retreats, I packed my trunks and slunk away to Varese.

[*He has not stirred. She looks at his stricken figure wofully and wanders towards the writing-table.*]

IRIS.

Varese! At Varese I found *him,* waiting for me. Unfortunately I had written to him informing him of my arrangements; and there he was, in the courtyard of the little hotel, and he came forward to greet me. I confess I was glad to meet him; it was a familiar face—[*advancing to the table in the centre*] Varese! How many times have I cursed Varese! He introduced me to some people who were wintering there—people who attached themselves to me, gave me treats, took me upon excursions. These I returned with interest. I felt myself compelled to have a small *salon* in which to entertain my new acquaintances—I who ought to have been weighing every sou; and soon, the afternoons growing chilly, I must needs send to Milan for a sable paletot to drive in. You see—step by step—he looking on——! And throughout all this I was allowing you to believe I was fighting the battle of poverty with you!

[*He stirs slightly. She essays to put a hand upon his shoulder, but falters and draws back.*]

IRIS.

After I had spent a couple of months at Varese, somebody proposed that we should move to Rome. And to

Rome we went—the whole party. [*Pressing her hands to her brow.*] Rome! Rome! It was at Rome, shortly after we arrived there, that I discovered I had overdrawn my account at his bank. Strangely enough, he was advised of the circumstance by the same mail—of course, it was the crisis he had been waiting for—and he came to me promptly with his pocket-book in his hand. Then it was that my eyes were opened. Early next day I sold my sables for a third of their value and made off—got out of the city—fled—literally fled. And there commenced my long term of penury. Laurence, if you ever forgive me—if I am ever to be forgiven in this world or hereafter—it will be because of my sufferings during the months that followed my flight from Rome. Finding myself hopelessly embarrassed, I set myself to hunt up my old friends in England. Friends! Ha! the scandal of our travelling abroad together—you and I—furnished them with a ready excuse to deliberately turn their backs upon a woman who had lost fortune and position. Only Fanny and Croker were left—Fanny living on relations at Stranraer, Croker upon his meagre salary as secretary of a club! Mainly to spare poor Croker the sight of me, I hid myself in cheap sea-side resorts out of their season, at the approach of their season crept inland to a stuffy town—all the while sinking further, further into debt and difficulty! At last every device for keeping my head above water was exhausted. I had even contrived to pledge the tiny income remaining from the wreck of my affairs, and I was without a shilling—absolutely without a shilling—my clothes nearly falling off me, my shoes in holes—ah! I was in London again by that time; it was as if I had come home for the finish. The horror of it! the back room in the narrow, grimy street; the regular, shameful visit to the pawnbroker's; the listless, mechanical stroll out in the dusk for air and exercise——! I! I—your Iris——! [*At the head of the settee.*] And one evening—he was continually tracing me and dogging my steps—one evening I met him and let him walk beside me; and—he handed me the key of this flat. Oh——!

[*Turning away and throwing herself upon the divan.*] They were waiting for me—these pretty rooms; they had been kept prepared for me for months. That was my deepest disgrace—that he seemed to be so certain I should find my way here.

[*She lies upon the divan, sobbing and moaning.* LAURENCE *removes his hands from his face and looks about him vacantly. Then he rises and walks, stiffly and heavily, to the fireplace.*]

LAURENCE.

[*Staring into the fire—speaking in a toneless, expressionless voice.*] I—I am intensely sorry for you, Iris.

IRIS.

[*Raising her head, faint and exhausted.*] Eh——?

LAURENCE.

I—I am sincerely sorry for you.

IRIS.

[*Putting her disordered hair back from her brow.*] Sorry for me——? I—I knew you would be. I—I was sure——

[*She leaves the divan and goes a little way towards him. Then, seeing that he does not turn to her, she checks herself.*]

IRIS.

[*By the settee, feebly.*] Ah—ah, yes—I ought to have spared you from learning it in this abrupt fashion. [*Sitting upon the settee, her eyes closed, her head resting against the back of the settee.*] How pitiless women are—especially to those they love, and have injured! Poor Laurie! But, dear, the first few weeks of my stay here were lived in a kind of stupor—inertia. I couldn't think—I couldn't reason. I didn't realise the dishonour—only that I was well-housed

again. And afterwards—at one moment I would find myself hoping that the shocking news might reach you from other sources, at the next that my breaking-off with you might keep you from returning to England and that, by some miracle, you'd never hear the truth—at any rate, till I had passed away. And so the months went on—and on——

LAURENCE.

[*Partly turning to her.*] This man—he wished to marry you once——

IRIS.

He wishes it still, to do him justice. Now that he has—oh!—revenged himself upon us, he finds out that he wishes to tie me to him.

LAURENCE.

[*Facing her.*] He is in earnest? he means it?

IRIS.

In earnest! indeed, yes. And—I—I suppose I should have acceded to his wish ultimately, if this had not happened—if you had not come back. [*Sitting upright and putting her hands together prayerfully.*] Laurie—Laurie——

LAURENCE.

[*Averting his eyes.*] Iris——

IRIS.

[*Going down upon her knees beside the table and bowing her head upon her clasped hands.*] Laurie—Laurie—Laurie——

LAURENCE.

I—I am very sorry.

[*He turns to the chair on his right and takes up his overcoat. Looking up, she sees his action.*]

IRIS.

[*Under her breath.*] Ah! [*Struggling to her feet.*] What are you doing?

LAURENCE.

[*Hanging his head.*] I—I am sorry.

[*She retreats, watching his movements. He goes to the table upon which he has deposited his hat.*]

IRIS.

Oh——! [*He picks up his hat.*] No——!

[*He advances, always avoiding her gaze, and stands before her looking upon the ground.*]

IRIS.

You—you can't pardon me? Oh, try. [*She waits for a reply, but he is silent.*] I had my good resolutions, Laurie; it was through them that we separated, if you remember—that I refused to go out with you. The little good in me, then, has proved my downfall. That's hard.

LAURENCE.

I—I'm sorry.

IRIS.

You could trust me now, dear, if you would but take me back with you. Oh, it would save me from so much that is hateful. Try! [*A pause.*] No? You—you feel you can't?

LAURENCE.

[*Inarticulately.*] I'm sorry.

IRIS.

[*Supporting herself by leaning upon the chair by the writing-table.*] *Have* you prospered? *Would* the home have been ready for me?

LAURENCE.

Yes.

IRIS.

[*Dropping her head upon her breast.*] Oh! [*Rallying a little and returning to him.*] Well, I don't reproach you. If I were a man, I suppose I should do precisely as you are doing. [*Piteously.*] Only I thought, as my first wrong step was taken for love of you——

LAURENCE.

[*Covering his eyes with his hand.*] Iris—Iris——!

IRIS.

Hush! I ought not to have said that to you; that wasn't fair.

[*She cries for a moment, softly, then dries her eyes and offers him her hand. He takes it.*]

IRIS.

By-and-by—in a little while—send me a photograph of that log-house of yours. Merely slip it into an envelope—will you? [*He inclines his head.*] Thanks. I should dearly like to have one—just to see——

[*She withdraws her hand and, after a brief struggle with himself, he goes to the door. Almost involuntarily, she totters after him for a few steps; but he leaves her without looking back. When he has gone, she drops upon the settee and sits there stunned and motionless. There is a pause; then the door on the right opens quietly and* MALDONADO *appears. He is still in his morning dress, but his necktie is disarranged and his eyes are bloodshot and his face livid. He comes to her and lays his hand upon her shoulder. With a cry of terror, she twists her body round and faces him.*]

MALDONADO.

Your visitor has departed—eh?

[*She rises and backs away from him towards the left. He follows her.*]

MALDONADO.

You rag of a woman! you double-faced trull! you liar!

IRIS.

Hush! Maldo——!

MALDONADO.

Ah——!

[*He seizes her by the arms and hurls her on to the settee. Then he stands over her, his eyes aflame.*]

MALDONADO.

You——!

IRIS.

Hush! Maldo! don't hurt me! Maldo!

[*Gripping her wrist, he pulls her up from the settee violently.*]

IRIS.

Maldo! Maldo! don't hurt me! Maldo!

[*He throws her from him again and she stumbles towards the fireplace, where she falls into the chair by the table. Once more he goes after her, uttering ferocious sounds, his fingers extended like claws. In the end, he forces himself to quit her side and staggers to the settee, upon which, his rage partially spent, he drops panting. There is silence between them for a time, broken only by her sobs and his heavy breathing.*]

IRIS.

Oh! oh! oh!

MALDONADO.

Ha, ha, ha! Ho, ho, ho! So—so—so you've lost your second sweetheart, have you? Or am I Number Two? Which of us do you rank first?

IRIS.

You—you know? You have listened, then?

MALDONADO.

[*Nodding scowlingly.*] He cleared out pretty sharply. Your influence is a diminishing quantity, my dear. You must be getting old.

IRIS.

How did you—learn——?

MALDONADO.

The note you wrote to him this morning, and tore up. You shouldn't have thought better of committing yourself to paper and then have scattered the scraps of your love-letter about your writing-table. [*She glances at the waste-paper basket.*] That dog Harrington is running your errands, is he?

[*She rises feebly and goes to the mantelpiece, upon which she leans.*]

MALDONADO.

Ha! an enjoyable day you've all given me! I've been in this accursed street for hours, waiting for Master Laurence to arrive or for you to come out.

IRIS.

Well, you see he has left me—left me for good——

MALDONADO.

Yes, the fellow has more sense than I, after all; a great

deal more sense than I. [*Rising and crossing the room, his hands thrust deep into his pockets.*] What an escape! what an escape!

IRIS.

Escape——?

MALDONADO.

Escape. [*Wiping the sweat from his brow.*] Phew! you're the sort of woman that sends a hot-blooded man to the gallows, my dear.

IRIS.

No, no, no, no——

MALDONADO.

You're not too old for that, still. Yes, to-day reads me a lesson. [*Partly to himself.*] Tsch! what a lesson, Freddy! what a lesson!

[*Absorbed in thought, he moves towards the mantelpiece. She shrinks from him and comes to the settee.*]

MALDONADO.

Oh, don't be frightened—my fit's over. [*Sitting staring before him, his fingers drumming upon the table.*] Only I must be careful in the future—more careful in the future. The risk is too deadly.

IRIS.

[*Seated upon the settee, eyeing him wonderingly.*] Risk——?

MALDONADO.

[*Again partly to himself.*] I have no ambition to figure in the dock some day. That's not my game. [*To her.*] I come of a race whose qualities are curiously blended, my dear—made up partly of passion, partly of prudence. For some years now, thanks to you, I've been letting the first run away with me. [*Drawing a deep breath.*] I can't afford that. Freddy Maldonado can't afford that. [*Bring-*

ing his fist down upon the table heavily.] To-night ends it —ends it! [*Rising and pointing to the door which admits to the hall.*] You can go.

IRIS.

Go——?

MALDONADO.

This place is mine——

IRIS.

Maldo——!

MALDONADO.

You'll take your departure.

IRIS.

Maldo!

MALDONADO.

You hear?

IRIS.

[*Rising.*] When—when——?

MALDONADO.

Now. I desire to be left alone.

IRIS.

[*Bewildered.*] To-night?

MALDONADO.

At once. This is your punishment, my dear——

IRIS.

Ah!

MALDONADO.

To drift back to the condition in which I found you a few months since. This is your reward.

IRIS.

Maldo——!

MALDONADO.

[*Ringing the bell.*] Go.

[*There is a pause, during which he continues ringing. Suddenly she stiffens her body and, like one walking in a dream, crosses the room and goes out at the door on the left. The servant appears.*]

MALDONADO.

[*To the servant.*] You'll all leave my service to-morrow, you women.

SERVANT.

Sir——!

MALDONADO.

Wages shall be paid you in lieu of notice, and a present given you.

SERVANT.

Thank you, sir.

MALDONADO.

Tell your fellow-servants.

SERVANT.

Yes, sir.

MALDONADO.

[*Listening.*] That'll do.

[*The servant withdraws as* IRIS *returns wearing a hat and cape and carrying her gloves. Her head still erect, she moves towards the door leading to the hall.*]

MALDONADO.

[*Playing with his beard.*] You—er——

[*Upon hearing his voice, she halts abruptly in the centre of the room.*]

MALDONADO.

You can send for your trinkets and clothes in the morning. After that, let me hear no more of you. [*She remains motionless, as if stricken.*] I've nothing further to say.

[*A slight shiver runs through her frame, and she resumes her walk. At the door, she feels blindly for the handle; finding it, she opens the door narrowly and passes out. Directly the door closes behind her,* MALDONADO *utters a fierce cry and, with one movement of his arm, sweeps the china and bric-a-brac from the mantelpiece. The fragments are scattered about the room.*]

MALDONADO.

Ah! ah! Ho, ho!

[*He overturns the table with a savage kick; then, raising a chair high in the air, he dashes it to the floor and breaks it into splinters. The curtain falls finally.*]

THE END

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